Explicit

Graphic Depictions Of Violence

Other

ULTRAKILL (Video Game)

Gabriel/V1 (ULTRAKILL)

Gabriel (ULTRAKILL)
V1 (ULTRAKILL)

Angels is bugs
Gabriel molts like some kind of bug or perhaps shrimp
Insect biology
Mating Cycles/In Heat
Not technically that last tag but it shares enough themes it's probably worth tagging
Religious Guilt
Religious Imagery & Symbolism
Begging
Multiple Orgasms
Orgasm Delay/Denial
Non-Human Genitalia
Blood
Blood and Gore
Blood Drinking
Pain Kink
many of these tags will become relevant in later chapters
Cannibalism
Sort Of
gabriel isn't human
and husks aren't sentient
but they are technically manifestations of human souls
so it's a grey area
wireplay

English ← Previous Work Part 3 of Angels is Bugs Next Work →

# SHRIMP! HEAVEN! NOW!

## LuxLightly

## Summary:

Gabriel and V1 find somewhere to wait out his next molt.
Gabriel deals with religious guilt and an ongoing identity crisis.
V1 deals with having something it wants to keep safe for the first time.
Both deal with the fact the one decent place they find to stay has a mirror on the ceiling.

Angels is Bugs.

## Chapter 1 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/53595460/chapters/135668077) : Don't Feed the Plants

## Summary:

Gabriel and V1 are in the Violence layer and Gabriel has a run in with a tree.

## Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes (#chapter_1_endnotes) .)

The second time Gabriel molted since meeting the Machine caught him far less by surprise. Mostly due to the necessity of it.

He cut his hand off.

Not to purposefully initiate a molt, mind you!

It had been a silly slip up, really. And, to be fair, it might have not even been fully necessary, but Hell was not the kind of place to take unnecessary chances.

He and the Machine had been in Violence. It was neither of their favorite layers, for certain, but Gabriel felt a sense of responsibility towards the twisted creations Hell had made from the souls that tried to escape through the Garden of Forking Paths.

The mannequins.

Every soul in Hell suffered, the mannequins were no different in that regard, but they'd come into existence because of Heaven’s lapse in control over the area.

When the iron grip of Heaven faltered after the Father's disappearance, souls tried to escape their torment through the labyrinth.

And Hell had been waiting for them.

Hell had torn so many desperate people to pieces and rearranged them into twisted creatures of perpetual agony.

Meanwhile, Gabriel had been busy, not stopping Hell from getting its claws into those souls, not sparing or protecting, but mercilessly cutting down the people in Lust who had managed to carve out a paradise from perdition, for the crime of daring not to suffer.

All so that the Council could claim they still enacted God's will.

He could not undo the damage he'd done, but perhaps he could grant the lost souls of Violence some kind of peace, even if it was through a final death.

V1 had seemed less than thrilled about the prospect. Backtracking didn't seem to be its style, especially not to a confusing maze filled with enemies that could move nearly as fast as its optics could keep up with.

There seemed to be something else about those layers that haunted it, but Gabriel didn't ask. Not that the Machine would have much of a way to give him an answer, anyway.

It had been more open to the idea when Gabriel explained he would be able to teleport them both in and out of the Garden. No need to actually navigate the maze.

It hadn't been the mannequins themselves that had tripped him up, but their surroundings.

He'd touched one of those damned trees.

He'd barely grazed it with the back of his left hand, but it was enough contact for the tree’s flesh to lash out, rapidly spreading over his hand like creeping vines.

He'd felt something dark and r e d laugh in the back of his mind and he'd moved without even pausing to think.

One swift motion of his sword cut clean through his armor, severing his hand from the rest of his arm at the wrist.

In retrospect, he might have been able to simply extract his hand and pull the flesh away, but he'd not even really considered the option. His body had felt an invading force, like an infection, and he’d excised it.

The Light of the Father had burned away any impurities of Hell that might have tried to take root in him, before. Without it…

He wondered what an angel mannequin would look like.

He shivered at the thought.

No. He'd rather not find out.

He watched with morbid curiosity, for a moment, as the spiderwebbing of flesh continued to envelope his hand, before turning away.

“Machine,” he called, getting the attention of V1, who had just finished off the last of the enemies. “I imagine your fuel tank is near full after that, but it would seem a waste not to offer.”

He held up his bleeding stump where his hand had been.

The Machine trotted to him, eagerly, pressing the wound to its chest with a pleased humming sound.

“Is there a difference, to you, between blood from different sources?” Gabriel asked. “Do you have…preferences?”

V1 looked up at him. The camera within its optic shifted, almost imperceptibly.

“Nevermind!” Gabriel said, quickly, before it could think to try to answer. “I don't think I want to know.”

The Machine’s optic adjusted again, then it shrugged and focused again on the blood flowing from Gabriel's arm.

The cut had been clean and the wound closed over quickly. Father's Light or no, Gabriel was still an angel and his ability to heal was far beyond that of a human being.

He inspected the stump that remained of his hand with a sigh.

“This is…less than ideal.”

V1 tapped its “chin” contemplatively. It then looked around the floor of the room, perking up when it found what it was looking for.

It ran to retrieve its quarry, the mostly intact hand of a fallen mannequin, then back to Gabriel, presenting it to him.

Gabriel was confused for a moment, then his gaze fell on V1’s four, mismatched arms.

“Ah. I see,” he said. “I appreciate the gesture, but I'm afraid I don't share your ability to append enemy limbs to myself. I cannot replace my lost hand with another’s.”

V1 started, wings flaring and seeming to balk in utter shock.

It looked, frantically, left and right, then ran to the tree that had now almost entirely enveloped Gabriel's lost hand and grabbed it, trying, fruitlessly, to free it from the tree's grasp.

“Machine…V1, that won't…”

V1 didn't seem to be paying attention to Gabriel’s objections.

He finally clapped a hand on the Machine's shoulder.

“Peace, friend!” he said, pulling V1 back and away from the tree, which luckily did not seem to be trying to entrap V1 the way it had Gabriel, either because it could not do so to a machine or simply because it was satisfied with its prize.

“The hand is forfeit, my friend,” Gabriel said, then quickly added, “But it's alright! It's not the first time I've lost a limb and likely won't be the last. I can regenerate it.”

V1 seemed to calm and Gabriel continued.

“It will take time, but, given the relatively small amount I need to regrow, I should be able to regenerate it in a single molt, two at the most,” he explained. “The extent of the damage is no doubt starting the process within me as we speak, but it will be some time before the ecdysis itself takes place.”

V1 tapped on the back of its wrist and tilted its head.

“How long? Uh…a week or two? Give or take?”

Gabriel shrugged.

“Last time was my first in centuries. I’m out of practice with this stuff,” he said. “But I’d like to prepare more appropriately for this one. Last time caught me unawares and it caused there to be…complications.

‘Getting stuck and almost suffocating in your own skin and having a full blown panic attack about being out in the open’ counts as “complications”, Gabriel figured.

V1 gave Gabriel a “go on” kind of hand motion.

“Well, first and foremost, I don’t want to be exposed when it happens again. I don’t care to be vulnerable like that out where anything could stroll by and kill me while I’m immobilized,” Gabriel continued.

V1 brandished its knuckleblaster fist, confidently.

Gabriel huffed a soft laugh.

“Yes, I’m sure you’re more than capable of fending off anything looking to make a snack of a molting angel,” he said, fondly. “But I’d rather not make things harder for us than they need to be. An extended period of rest is usually highly encouraged but I should be fine up and until the actual--uh--”

Gabriel paused as he felt V1 pushing on his chest, sliding him along the floor.

“Uh, Machine? What are you doing?”

V1 stopped in its attempts to move him and pointed at him sternly, then mimed leaning its head on its hands, pressed palm to palm.

“As I said, rest is recommended but I shouldn’t have to until fairly close to--”

V1 didn’t seem to accept his argument, going back to trying to scoot him along the floor.

“Machine, I assure you this is unnecessary!” Gabriel insisted. “I’ve at least a week before I need to worry about this! I’ve made do with far less! Hell, I managed to do it last time even after getting stuck and having to tear my old shell apart

to get out!"

V1 stopped pushing him and its gaze dropped to the floor, wings drooping.

The sudden change in the Machine's demeanor surprised Gabriel.

"Why is this so important to you, V1?" he asked.

V1 wrung its hands in a decidedly human-like way. Sometimes it amazed Gabriel how many of its creator's mannerisms had trickled down to their creations. Did they intend it? He wondered what that might say about himself and his own creator.

It looked up at him with its optic partially lidded, wings still drooped, and made a mournful sort of whirring noise.

The barrier of language (or lack thereof) between the two of them was less frequently an obstacle than Gabriel would have expected. V1 was very emotive and didn't usually seem to desire to express anything in words. It seemed contented to let Gabriel do all the talking and understanding between them was easy, shockingly so, even without words.

However, there were still times, like this one, where the ability to communicate more clearly was sorely missed by them both.

V1 looked down again and seemed to focus intensely.

It let out a series of whirring noises, then, at last, a garbled approximation of a voice. Whatever it was using to produce the sound was not a proper voice box, almost certainly. It always seemed to take an enormous amount of effort and concentration to create the nearly incomprehensible words, so it was not a feature it used lightly. Only when it had something important to say.

"Y O U S C A R E D"

Gabriel let out a baffled laugh.

"I'm not scared," he assured, tone light-hearted. "I've done this hundreds of times before."

V1 just looked up at him again. It tapped on its chest, optic locked on his face.

"You? You scared… I scared--"

Then Gabriel understood.

"I scared you," he said, voice low. "You found my shed skin and you thought…"

V1 nodded, slowly.

Gabriel's shoulders slumped. He tried to imagine what he'd have felt if he came across what appeared to be the rent apart remains of V1. The sudden pit of dread in his stomach. The overwhelming grief. The yawning span of an eternity alone stretching before him. Because he hadn't been there.

It certainly would have left a mark on him, even if the misunderstanding was quickly remedied.

"I am sorry to have worried you so badly," Gabriel said. "But I promise I'll be fine. And, even if I wanted to rest properly, I don't think there's much of anywhere to comfortably rest in Hell."

V1 perked up and held up two fingers.

"Two?"

V1 took two of its hands and cupped them into a heart shape, then held up two fingers again.

"Two hearts? Oh! The second layer? Lust?" Gabriel asked.

V1 nodded enthusiastically.

Gabriel felt guilt settle like a stone in his stomach.

"I suppose the city has apartments that are mostly intact but…" He tried to fight back a wave of memory of past violence that threatened to overtake him.

Minos' attempts to talk. The screaming and crying of the citizens of Lust.

The cry, from his own lips, that he had somehow not been able to taste the bitter irony of:

'JUSTICE!'

"I…don't really think I want to go back to that layer," he said at last.

V1 tilted its head, confused.

"That layer is the site of some of the very worst of my crimes, and of the very deepest of my regrets. It's…not easy for me to be there," Gabriel explained.

V1 considered this, then clasped two of its hands together, fingers entwined.

It looked up at him and rapidly opened and closed the lid of its optic with a "clk clk clk clk clk" sound.

For a moment, Gabriel thought it might be taking some kind of photographs before he realized it was attempting to replicate the effect of batting one's eyelashes.

He huffed a bemused chuckle.

"Begging? A base tactic, even for you, Machine," he teased, then shook his head. "But as with all your dirty tricks, I find myself embarrassingly susceptible to it."

He sighed.

“Fine. You win. We can find somewhere in Lust to hole up until I molt again. What else do I really have to do nowadays?”

V1’s wings perked up and it threw its arms around Gabriel in a tight hug.

“Alright, alright,” Gabriel chuckled. He wrapped his good arm around the Machine, holding it firmly to him. “You remember how this goes. Shield your eye and don't let go of me.”

V1 obediently shuttered its optic and squeezed tighter around Gabriel's waist.

In a flash of golden light, the pair vanished.

## Notes:

So this is now something I've written. I'm going to be posting a few chapters a day, since it's kind of long and I still need to edit the later chapters.

Chapter title is from the musical Little Shop of Horrors.

## Chapter 2 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/53595460/chapters/135668650) : Idle Hands

## Summary:

Gabriel and V1 find a suitable place to wait out Gabriel's impending molt.

Gabriel has some complaints about the furniture.

## Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes (#chapter_2_endnotes) .)

“Absolutely not.”

Gabriel realized he was being obstinate. They'd been searching for some time and they'd been very lucky to find an apartment this intact at all, nevermind one that had a bed that was still in good condition.

V1 pointed at the bed and held its hands up, with a large gap between them, to indicate its size, visibly growing annoyed at Gabriel's reluctance.

Yes, it was an extremely large bed, big enough to fit Gabriel's whole body without him having to completely contort himself. But…

“... it's heart shaped…” Gabriel said, discomfort apparent in his voice. “And there’s a mirror on the ceiling…”

V1’s arms went slack and it stared at him for a moment in apparent disbelief before slapping the palm of its hand over its optic and letting out a whirring noise that sounded distinctly like a groan.

Gabriel's face heated up.

“Alright, maybe I am being a bit squeamish but I shudder to think what kinds of lurid acts took place on a bed like this!” he argued.

V1 mimed gasping, sucking in air through its air vents, hand over the bottom of its face where a mouth would be.

It shuttered its optic and made a crossing motion over its chest (which definitely was not in the correct order, though Gabriel had a feeling that pointing that out wouldn't help his case), then raised the back of its hand to the rim over its optic, pretending to feel faint.

Gabriel huffed in annoyance and embarrassment. He tried to fold his arms, but was impeded by his lack of a left hand. Frustrated, he let them fall to his sides.

“Mock me if you will, but don't forget that I'm the one humoring you with this!”

V1 successfully folded its own arms, a rather pointed demonstration of the necessity of this endeavor, and stared him down with a half lidded optic.

Gabriel groaned. This was an argument he wasn't going to win.

“Fine!” he exclaimed, throwing his arms up in defeat. “I'll rest on the heart bed! Lord knows it's not like I had any dignity left anyway.”

Here's hoping the sheets had been cleaned before the apartment owner’s untimely demise.

V1 perked up and gave him four thumbs up.

“Yes, yes, whatever…” Gabriel grumbled, climbing up onto the bed and sitting, cross legged, on top of the blankets.

“Well, if I'm going to be forced to take the recommended amount of bed rest, I may as well do this entirely by the book,” he said. “That should give me the best chance of growing my hand back in a single molt.”

V1 motioned for him to elaborate.

“The molting process is as follows: my outer shell, my cuticle, will detach from the skin beneath it. Then my body will begin digesting my old shell from within, while growing a new one beneath it. Once the new shell is finished, I shed what remains of the old one,” Gabriel explained.

V1 nodded, waiting for him to continue.

“In terms of what I need to do to prepare…well…uh…God, it's been so long, let's see if I can even remember… We've established a more or less secure space, next would be ensuring a consistent temperature, but this layer’s ambient temperature is already sufficient. Then there's…hm…”

Gabriel trailed off.

V1 tilted its head in a silent question.

“Well…um…when I molt, I have to regrow everything here--” He gestured to his armor. “--beneath the skin. As well as, in this case, a new hand. That takes mass. I can take it from other places in my body and try to make up the difference afterwards but, if I want to ensure I don't need multiple molts to regrow my hand, I would need to ingest mass from another source. That is to say…food.”

He grimaced, internally.

“Though, even if the notion sounded appealing to me, there's not exactly a surplus of food to be found in Hell.”

V1 tapped its “chin”, thinking for a moment, before snapping its fingers and pointing upwards in a “eureka!” gesture.

“Hm? You’ve got an idea?”

V1 nodded, excitedly. It pressed the palms of its hands together and made a wiggling sort of motion with them.

“I’m…not sure I follow…”

V1 held up a finger, then dashed to the door, rushing from the apartment.

After a moment, Gabriel pieced together the meaning of their hand motion.

“...Wait, you mean fish?” he tried to call after it. “You can’t take those out of Wrath, they discorporate!”

No response.

Well…it’d figure that one out itself, eventually.

Hopefully it could at least find some blood so the excursion wasn't a total waste. Admittedly the mental image of the Machine splashing around the waters of Wrath trying to grab the elusive black fish that sometimes populated it was…cute.

What a strange description to apply to the Machine, yet he couldn’t find it in him to retract it. It was…cute. At times. Grotesque at others. Others still, beautiful.

Frustrating and fascinating. Infuriating and infatuating. Macabre and marvelous. A thousand contradictions.

The Machine was…something.

Just what, Gabriel couldn't hope to say.

It was nothing simple, certainly. Nothing about their strange…truce? Friendship? Relationship? Nothing about their…situation was simple. It was so often effortless, like breathing. Yet it remained so infuriatingly undefined. Even their little “tryst” after his last molt had done nothing to clarify where they stood.

Or maybe he was just stupid. That certainly couldn’t be discounted.

Gabriel unfolded his legs and fell backwards onto the bed with a sigh, arms outstretched.

He looked at the reflection in the mirror above, lying in the bed that once held countless lovers, that atop, now, rested only their murderer. Arms out and wings splayed, he looked like some kind of caricature of the Messiah.

That or a pinned insect.

The reflection stared back at him. Or maybe it didn't. The lack of eyes made it hard to tell. Lord knew he didn’t know what he was looking at, either.

Certainly not the Righteous Hand of God. No vessel for the Father’s Will, nor His Light. No judge of a dying Hell. No arbiter of divine justice.

Just another strange mass of metal and meat scraping out an existence at the end of all things.

Lying in a heart shaped bed.

He wondered if destroying the mirror would be worth the amount of glass shards he’d have to pick from the bedding. Probably not.

Groaning, Gabriel sat back up.

He folded his legs again.

Normally, in moments of rest and solitude like this, the expected thing to do would be to pray. It quieted the mind and centered the body. It had always brought a sense of peace to him.

The idea of sending prayers out into the void that was the Father’s absence held no appeal to Gabriel, now, however.

So what was prayer without an intended recipient? Meditation, maybe?

Gabriel didn't have "eyes" in the typical sense, more of a perfect awareness of his surroundings constructed from the input of many different senses, at least several of which had no human equivalent. That being said, he could choose to stop the visual part of that sensory input, which he generally imagined as being "closing his eyes".

And so he closed his eyes and tried to meditate.

He didn't know what to do with his hands.

Hand.

His first thought was to clasp them together, as he would in prayer, but this was not prayer. Also the lack of a left hand made that idea impossible anyway.

What did people normally do? Pinch their thumb and forefinger together? That felt…

Really stupid.

Gabriel huffed, annoyed, and settled for putting his hand and handless stump in his lap.

What did people think about when they meditated?

Prayer was all about God. Thanking Him for the good things, asking for His guidance for the bad. Begging His forgiveness for transgressions and asking to be worthy of His blessing. There was no room for true self reflection in prayer for there was no self without the Father.

What would an act of finding internal peace possibly look like, not through the lens of offering it to Him? A focus entirely on the self? Or an absence of thought at all, focusing instead on the body?

Gabriel had spent his whole existence as an extension of God's will. He'd been made for the express purpose of acting in His name. He didn't know what "self" he was without Him.

Considering his first acts after His disappearance, the will he followed the moment His will was gone, he wasn't sure he wanted to know. No one good, that much was certain.

His arm itched at the point where his hand had been severed.

Did the Father, too, cut away His Hand, to be free of the infection claiming it? Had Gabriel already fallen, long before His Light was stripped away? Had all of creation already succumbed to rot when He disappeared? Had there been nothing left to do but amputate, before such corruption could reach back to Him?

Or was Gabriel still just desperate to believe he'd not been abandoned? Was it just easier to believe, still, that he had failed, than to accept there was never any act, any level of perfection and purity that would have kept his Father's eyes upon him?

Gabriel opened his eyes again with a growl.

"Meditation is overrated!" he snapped.

He stood and tore the sheets from the bed. The windows of the room left him feeling exposed. It would be difficult to cover them with only one hand to hang sheets over them with, but at least that meant it would likely take enough time and concentration to keep him out of his own head until the Machine returned. If not, he'd just find something else to do. To

After all, the devil finds work for idle Hands.

## Notes:

Shut up and get on the giant sex bed, Gabriel.

I'm imagining it the size of one of those huge sex couches from the 70s or whenever. It's a large bed meant for several people or at least one angel and robot.

## Chapter 3 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/53595460/chapters/135699943) : I Need to See It I Need to Know It

## Summary:

V1 tries to catch a fish. Only ends up catching feelings.

## Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes (#chapter_3_endnotes) .)

So.

Turns out you couldn't take fish out of Wrath. Or even really out of the water at all.

V1 probably should have seen that one coming.

"Providing an otherwise peaceful and accessible source of food" wasn't exactly Hell's style.

It'd taken a good twenty minutes of splashing around the shallower waters of Wrath, flinging itself at tiny, deceptively fast fish and getting sand in just about every uncomfortable crevice it could possibly manage to get sand in, before V1, at last, managed to grab a pathetically tiny fish and pull it out of the water.

At which point it promptly exploded into a puff of bloody mist. Too small to even feed off of.

V1 spent the next ten minutes using its nail gun to vent its frustrations on the rest of the fish population of its general vicinity, turning the water red with their blood, still too diluted to use.

Blood, blood everywhere and not a drop to drink. It was going to have to go hunting for itself, now, on top of trying to find something for Gabriel.

It sat, heavily, on a stone jutting out from the sand.

What was it doing? Beyond just its fruitless attempts at fishing, what was it even trying to accomplish with all this? Forcing an Archangel to play house because, what? Because apparently angels were some kind of weird bug or hermit crab or something and he could die if his molt went wrong?

Gabriel had told it that he was fine. None of this was necessary. And yet here it was, covered in sand that was probably made of bone dust or something stupid and cliched like that, trying to catch what may or may not be the tiny souls of fish who'd somehow learned to sin (Good for them?).

Why?

…Because it was scared.

That was the long and short of it, wasn't it? This wasn't about Gabriel. It never really was.

It was about the way V1 had never felt fear before like what it felt when it came across Gabriel's shed skin.

It'd been afraid before, sure. The kind of simulated adrenaline response that served to help it avoid things that would harm it, instilled as a measure of self preservation. It had even, at times, felt the beginnings of existential dread, thinking about the inevitable end of even Hell's blood supply, but those were feelings that were easy to dismiss and to move past.

Thinking Gabriel had been killed was…not easy to dismiss.

He'd been acting so strangely, beforehand, nearly getting killed by a handful of filth. His limbs making sounds like bones breaking and him acting skittish and terrified in a way V1 had never seen him do.

When V1 had tried to reach out to him, he'd fled in a fit of rage.

At first, V1 had been pissed off, content to let the petulant angel fly off to have a temper tantrum somewhere, just because V1 had the audacity to be mildly concerned for his well being. No rust off its back.

By the time it had gone looking for him…it had appeared to be too late. Rent pieces of angelic armor littered the ground, only the main chest piece intact enough to make it unmistakable what their source had been.

V1 had never really felt lonely. It was the only of its model, that was just a fact, nothing that brought it any real distress. V2 had been the closest thing to itself that had existed, but it hadn't particularly upset it to kill it any more than any other machine vying for the limited blood of Hell.

It hadn't been made to work in a group. It had no reason to seek or appreciate companionship. No reason to feel lonely.

And yet, in that moment, staring out over whatever time it had left before the last drops of blood of Hell were squeezed dry, completely alone…It had opened an emptiness in it that threatened to swallow it whole.

Somewhere along the line, Gabriel had become more than a convenient source of blood. But what?

Gabriel was…something.

Not just a source of fuel or a foe seeking to destroy it. Most living things that didn't fall into those two categories were more or less irrelevant to it. But Gabriel was neither, but also both? And he was very very important. It was confusing.

V1 had thought maybe the fact they fucked (sort of?) might have made it a little clearer what in the Hell (Ha!) their deal was, but it still lingered in some weird undefined place. A fuck buddy was neither food nor foe, and could be important, at least temporarily, but somehow Gabriel still didn't fit that, either.

So now it was scared. Which sucked. And scared for someone besides itself. Which sucked even more. Being scared for itself was easy. All it had to do was not die. It was good at that. Making sure someone *else* didn't die? That, it wasn't so good at. In fact, it was really, really good at doing the opposite of that.

Made for it, in fact.

Memories from the Violence layer played in its mind for a split second and it shuddered, pushing those thoughts aside and focusing on the task at hand.

How the hell did one even take care of an Angel? Did you water them? Was soil PH going to be something to consider?

Apparently, you were supposed to feed them. And it couldn't even manage that.

Pushing air through its exhaust ports in a facsimile of a sigh, V1 stood. It was getting low on blood, now. Luckily, that was far easier to find than what Gabriel needed.

Wait.

Maybe V1 was being stupid. It couldn't be that simple, could it? And yet, it could see no reason why it wouldn't be.

It pulled out its revolver with a renewed enthusiasm.

## Notes:

Chapter title shamelessly stolen from the game itself because it's very funny to me. I consider the secret levels to not be canon (though the terminal entries within are) so the only fish in Wrath are the little black ones that disappear as soon as the water around them is drained.

I tend to characterize V1 as probably a lot sweeter and less homicidal than in canon but it also does come from the fact that it can't really speak. It's internal dialogue is generally a bit less innocent. I deeply enjoy the changes in tone between Gabriel and V1's POV. V1 has a lot more thoughts directed at itself or the reader, cuts away frequently with tangents or comments, and tends to make itself laugh from its own stupid jokes.

## Chapter 4 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/53595460/chapters/135700843) : Without Raising Questions of Conscience

## Summary:

Gabriel has some moral qualms about V1's choice in food.

He gets over them, but not before quoting the Bible about it.

## Notes:

"If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience.
[...]
For why is my freedom being judged by another's conscience?"

-1 Corinthians 10

(See the end of the chapter for more notes (#chapter_4_endnotes) .)

In the end, in the time it took before the Machine returned, Gabriel had: covered each of the windows, replaced the sheets with new ones he found in a closet along with some other extra bedding he also added to the bed, cleaned the entire apartment of all clutter(including but not limited to: debris, rotting plant matter from long dead houseplants, bits of human and nonhuman remains, small vermin, and another one of those annoying blue glowing spheres), sharpened and polished Justice and Splendor (arguably the hardest task with only one hand) and managed to talk himself out of destroying the ceiling mirror on at least three occasions.

Not bad for a man currently down an appendage and quite literally starting to come out of his own skin.

Hearing approaching footsteps made Gabriel summon his sword to his hand readying himself for a fight, before he reminded himself of who they belonged to and forced his body to relax.

Pre-molt anxiety setting in, already, it seemed.

The Machine appeared in the doorway of the apartment, body speckled with blood that had not yet been fully absorbed into its plating.

In one of its auxiliary hands, it held something Gabriel couldn't quite make out, but the slow dripping of blood from it onto the floor confirmed it was almost certainly some kind of flesh. At least the long trip back seemed to have given it plenty of time to drain most of its blood so the apartment wasn't entirely drenched.

"Did you actually manage to find something?" he asked, pleasantly surprised.

The process would be immeasurably easier on him if his body didn't have to cannibalize itself in order to grow his new armor and limb.

V1 gave him three thumbs up, making a whistling noise akin to fanfare.

“Proud of ourselves, are we?” Gabriel chuckled. “What is it, then?”

V1 tossed the mystery object to Gabriel, who managed to catch it, despite his missing hand. It landed in his arms with a heavy squelching sound.

Definitely flesh.

But from what source? There were no animals in Hell of a significant size to have harvested this much from. The greenish gray flesh wasn't from any animal Gabriel recognized.

“What is this?”

V1 hunched over and held 2 of its hands behind its back, then used the other two to mime gnashing a set of jaws where its own mouth would be.

Huh?

No limbs? Or at least no front legs. But teeth?

Gabriel looked back down at the object he had been presented and with a thrill of horror, he recognized it at last.

The torso of a filth.

He cried out in shock and disgust.

“Machine, that's *vile!*” he exclaimed, nearly dropping the ragged chunk of flesh. “You didn't--you can't seriously expect me to--”

Gabriel retched.

V1 tilted its head in apparent confusion, not seeming to understand the issue.

“This is from a filth! A husk!”

V1 nodded, calmly as if they'd been discussing the weather.

“It's a human being!”

V1 made a wiggly “so-so” hand gesture.

“It…it *was*, anyway…sort of.”

Gabriel looked down at the chunk of flesh, once more.

Filth were the lowest of husks. A manifestation of a human soul they may have been, but it was certainly a stretch to call them “human”. Their level of intelligence and awareness was less than all but the simplest animals. More of a series of reactions to stimuli than a thinking creature, on par with something like a jellyfish. Only aware enough to feel hunger.

Even less so now, being that it was dead and a torso.

V1 still just stared blankly at Gabriel.

He supposed that, to a machine that was made to consume the blood of living human beings, the idea of consuming the flesh of what had been a crude manifestation of a human soul was utterly devoid of any moral weight.

“It's…I don't think I can…” he said, trying and failing to find the words.

V1 deflated. Whether or not it understood why Gabriel was not willing to accept its offering, it clearly recognized that it had failed in its task.

Gabriel sat on the edge of the bed, a sickly churning in his gut, bordering on pain.

He was disappointed as well. Molting took so much energy to begin with, then the regrowth on top of that, especially when his last molt had been so recent. Food would have made this so much easier.

His gut twisted again and he sucked in a hiss from the pain.

Staring at the meat in his lap, with a shiver, Gabriel recognized the nearly forgotten sensation.

Hunger.

Gabriel was hungry.

It had been so long since he'd felt it, he almost didn't recognize the feeling.

It twisted his stomach again. Seemingly emboldened by being given name, it made sure to make itself known.

This flesh, this…*thing*, wasn't human. Maybe some part of it had been a twisted parody of one, but even that was gone now.

It wasn't human.

*Gabriel* wasn't human.

And he was *hungry.*

*“Oh God, my God. Dear Lord, forgive me,”* Gabriel whispered, beseeching the empty air. *“Turn away your face from my sin.”*

God, as always, was painfully silent.

Gabriel let the silence settle over him. Let the suffocating vacuum of the Father's absence absolve him of His judgment. God had turned away His face long ago.

The only eye upon Gabriel, now, held no judgment, only understanding.

“Oh, God. It's been so long…” Gabriel said. “Let's see if I can even remember how to do this.”

He focused on his jaw, trying to remember the long disused muscles there and how they moved. He shifted his jaw from side to side, experimentally, then flexed the muscles on either side of his “chin”, pulling in opposite directions until--

*CRACK!*

The bottom of his helmet split up the center to just below the cross in the center of his face, separating into two, jagged mandibles.

He let his maxillary palps reach out from within the rest of his mouthparts, the segmented, finger-like appendages curling and tasting the air.

It tasted like blood, flesh, and metal.

Gabriel salivated. It had been a very, very long time, indeed.

He raised the husk flesh to his mouth and bit down, mandibles slicing into the meat. A quick turn of his head tore a chunk from the whole and his palps passed it back to the rest of his mouthparts, which chewed the morsel thoroughly before swallowing it.

Clumsily at first, then with an increasing deftness and fervor, he fed.

It was…good.

Or maybe Gabriel was just too hungry to care. He could taste the slight tang of rot permeating the flesh, along with a hint of something like sulfur, but it was far outweighed by the relief of food after so many eons without it. Mass to replace what he was regrowing under his skin. Calories to fuel the growth.

When his mandibles crunched into bone, he did not pause, instead cracking a rib clean off of the rest of the rib cage. His powerful jaws crushed it with ease and he sucked in a quick breath, making a noise almost like a chirp.

*That* was good. That was definitely good.

Using his good hand, Gabriel dug into the torso and snapped off another rib, crunching it with relish.

Calcium. Iron. Phosphate. Collagen. Osteocalcin.

The building blocks of his cuticle, his armor.

Tinges of gold began to bleed into his wings at their base.

Yes. Yes, that was very, *very* good.

## Notes:

The moral implications of eating a filth are a bit of a grey area. And a bug's gotta eat.

Gabriel gets to show off his cool mouthparts I did a frankly immense amount of research on. I even made a diagram with color coded anatomy: (https://www.tumblr.com/luxlightly/741169047040933888)

And I continue my ongoing bit about Gabriel finding soul orbs and throwing them away because he doesn't know what they are.

## Chapter 5 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/53595460/chapters/135701296) : But Like a Crowbar

## Summary:

Gabriel has a snack while V1 has a slight identity crisis.

## Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes (#chapter_5_endnotes) .)

Whatever V1 had expected Gabriel's mouth to look like…it had *not* been *that.*

The main pincher things had been a shock, by themselves. At first, V1 was afraid that Gabriel had hurt himself. The rest of the mouthparts had utterly bewildered it.

A complicated mechanism of moving parts all working in tandem, like a miniature assembly line. It was almost hypnotizing to watch.

V1 sat on the floor, content to allow Gabriel to enjoy his meal in peace.

It still couldn't understand exactly what Gabriel's misgivings about it had been in the first place, but it was glad he overcame them. It seemed like he really needed it.

He tore into the meat with increasing enthusiasm, eventually even using his hand to tear out chunks of bone and flesh, mouthparts that could crush bone swapping, occasionally, to delicately clean the viscera from his fingers.

It was, without a doubt, the most beautiful thing V1 had ever witnessed.

Gabriel was always beautiful. He'd been made to be, V1 supposed. But this?

This animalistic thing? This force of nature? This clawing, writhing, insatiable creature of hunger, of rage, of desire?

Surely nothing Gabriel had left behind in Heaven could be half as divine.

V1 had seen the first glimpse of it at the end of their first fight. The perfect, angelic persona fractured and something furious and *alive* shone through the cracks.

And it was radiant.

But it scared him. He thought it was something to be ashamed of. He'd been made to feel ashamed of it.

In their next fight, V1 had watched with awe as shame and anger melted into exhilaration and ecstasy.

He'd been so beautiful then, too. So primal, so real, so alive!

*"Fight me like an animal!"*

It had known with those words that he felt it, too. Felt the way they, two things of unnatural creation, in one way or another, found a deeper, feral nature in themselves and in each other.

In that moment, they were their own desires, their own drives. They were more than what they'd been made to be. Because of each other.

Gabriel was different after V1.

And V1 was different, after Gabriel.

Its model had never gone to production. It never saw the War before it was over. Never laid eyes on what it was made to combat.

Until Violence.

Where it stared its purpose in the eyes. Somehow it knew, from that first moment, that it had been made for this fight. It knew that Hell knew, too.

Hell had coaxed V1 into growing the trees whose roots ensnared the beast's legs, giving V1 the opportunity to infiltrate it.

Hell had been robbed of this showdown on Earth, it would not be robbed of it within its own depths.

V1 prided itself on adaptability and lethality. It could find a way to kill whatever it was put up against.

But the Earthmover?

There was nothing to adapt.

It glided through spaces perfectly sized for its body, navigated twisted paths perfectly suited to its internal sense of direction, destroyed internal structures perfectly vulnerable to its attacks.

It was not easy. On the contrary, it was probably the most difficult fight it had ever had. But it had been…right. Correct.

V1 had been at home in the bowels of the Earthmover in a way it had never been before.

Was that what a virus felt, upon finding a compatible host? What a parasitoid wasp felt, burrowing out of the flesh of its living cradle? The sudden realization of having been so specifically made, so carefully crafted, to fit perfectly into another living thing?

Not like a key, but like a crowbar.

As the metal behemoth crumbled around it, the city atop its back toppling to a ground so covered in bodies no earth could be seen beneath it, V1 had felt with a sudden and terrible clarity, its own place within the Null Ouroboros.

In its mind's eye, it could see swarms of machines identical to itself bringing the lumbering titans to their knees. And the carpet of bodies would grow thicker and thicker, until the next wave, built to combat its horde of siblings, brought them down in turn.

A machine created to create the machine to crush the machine.

Perhaps, had its own path through Hell played out differently, the vision would have felt perfect, like a dream.

Had it not met Gabriel.

Gabriel who was not fuel nor foe. Gabriel who was something else. Gabriel who carved out a new space in the world for something else to exist. Something that was not just bloodshed. Something that was not just death.

He was the emptiness of farewell, the yearning of anticipation, and the thrill of reunion. He was the promise of another meeting. He was the idea of the future. He was touches that didn't draw blood. He was words that didn't end in screaming. He was the setting sun and the promise of its morning rise.

Gabriel was…life. Living. The very idea that there was more to existence than fighting. Than killing.

And every time they met, it felt like more of the world suddenly appeared to V1, as if curtains had been drawn back, revealing more to living than it had ever stopped to consider. Interactions it never thought to have, experiences it had never thought to try.

V1 was different, after Gabriel.

And this new V1 panicked and thrashed as it felt the unending chain of its purpose ensnare it like a noose around its neck.

The feeling weighed on it, still.

In this moment, watching Gabriel, however, the weight felt lessened.

Maybe this was the peace that people found in faith.

V1 couldn't really understand the idea of religion, but worship?

Yes, watching as ruby drops of blood dripped from powerful, jagged jaws, it could understand worship.

## Notes:

I try to imagine just what it is that attracts V1 to Gabriel and to a relationship with Gabriel outside of the purely physical. It's pretty clear from canon what Gabriel sees in V1, but V1 has very little in game characterization. I imagine that they both represent, to each other, the idea of something to life besides the purposes they were created to fill, just in very different ways.

V1 is far less repressed about its own feelings for Gabriel, not being raised within the literal Catholic canon, but a lot of those emotions are somewhat new or at least not exactly well defined for it.

## Chapter 6 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/53595460/chapters/135734197) : To Sleep...

## Summary:

Gabriel waxes poetic about abstinence (no not that kind).
V1 takes a nap.

## Notes:

There's MEAT in those machines. I reference that frequently in this fic so that's important to know and be aware of. For the record, that is canon, as confirmed by the main dev. I pulled a lot of things out of my ass for this fic but that isn't one of them. They have living tissue and organs in them to keep the blood fresh.

(See the end of the chapter for more notes (#chapter_6_endnotes) .)

Gabriel ended up eating every last scrap of the meal V1 had given him.

He fastidiously cleaned every segment of the armor of his hand with his mouthparts before pulling them all back behind his mandibles again and closing his mouth, latching his mandibles together so tightly that the seam was nearly invisible.

“...thank you,” he said, after a moment. “I needed that far more than I realized.”

The guilt for his actions tried to again find purchase in his mind, but his body felt too content to spare them more than a brief thought. He felt…good. Maybe better than he had in a long time.

He glanced over at the Machine, watching him with its head propped up by its elbows, resting on its folded knees.

It gave him a slow, distracted thumbs up.

“Are you well?” he asked. “You seem lethargic. Do you need fuel?”

V1 perked up, raising its head from its hands with a sudden start.

It waved its hands in front of it and shook its head rapidly, then gave a more energetic thumbs up.

For some reason he didn't fully understand, Gabriel felt suddenly bashful.

“Ah. Right. Well… thank you. Again. Since I…said that…already.”

He cleared his throat.

His anxiety faded to a dull buzz in the back of his mind and the restless energy settled into a calm fatigue. Amazing what a decent meal could do. Maybe he should indulge in his more mortal needs more often.

Speaking of which…

He yawned.

"Do you sleep, Machine? Or some equivalent?" Gabriel asked. "I don't think I've ever seen you do so."

V1 made a wiggly "so-so" sort of hand gesture.

"Can you?"

A nod.

"But you don't have to, if you choose not to."

Another nod.

"Then we're very much the same, in that way," Gabriel mused. "Is it beneficial? Or simply for pleasure?"

V1 held up a single finger.

"First one? It's beneficial, but just not strictly necessary to survival."

V1 nodded. It pointed to him and tilted its head.

"Me? I…I don't actually know, to be honest," Gabriel admitted. "Angels experience many of the same needs and biological processes as mortals, but we can forgo them, much as mortals can. Eventually a mortal must submit to them, however, lest they perish. Angels can abstain indefinitely."

V1 simply listened.

"It was said that we were made with bodies susceptible to mortal desires in order to solidify our devotion through perfect, eternal abstention. We could know temptation so that we could overcome it and, in doing so, become closer to God," he explained. "Now…I'm not sure. I don't know what I really need, anymore. I don't know what things I can truly go without and not face consequence and what were just more of the endless rules to keep Heaven in line. I don't know what of that has changed now that I am without the Father's Light. I fumble to find the space between hedonism and self flagellation. I was always told the absence of one could only be the other."

He looked over to V1, who stared at him blankly. It blinked its optic, with no apparent comprehension.

Apparently "the virtues of self-denial" were not covered extensively in its programming.

"Ah, sorry," Gabriel said, with a sheepish chuckle. "I can get somewhat…overly philosophical. My apologies."

V1 waved off his concern.

"Would you care to sleep?" Gabriel asked. "We're not likely to have another opportunity to rest safely like this soon."

V1 nodded, enthusiastically.

"Very well, I'll keep--"

Gabriel was cut off by the sound of metal collapsing to the floor. It seemed as though V1 had seen no reason to raise itself from where it sat to move to a more appropriate sleeping spot, instead just crumpling like a puppet with its strings cut.

"...watch."

Gabriel huffed.

Curious, he stood and walked over to V1's prone form and knelt beside it.

He gave it an experimental poke.

No reaction.

A slow, steady blinking of the lights on its chest was the only indication it was still alive.

Alive? Functional? Online?

Gabriel leaned down close and listened carefully.

Quiet, barely perceptible, even to his enhanced senses, was the faint whirring of mechanics, the rhythmic rush of flowing blood, and the squelching of undulating organs and pulsating flesh.

Alive.

When he'd cut through the very first machine he'd ever faced and saw the meat and gore within, he'd nearly been sick.

What unholy, damned creation had humanity forged? How could they have twisted flesh made in His image into such a perverse, unnatural housing?

And yet, now, the gentle hum of life emanating from the Machine brought him only a sense of comfort.

Its sleeping position, however, did not.

It was unnerving, seeing the Machine in an unmoving heap, and they didn't spend nearly a full day scouring the ruins of Lust in search of a proper bed for nothing.

Gabriel leaned down and scooped V1 into his arms. Even this movement didn't rouse it. Gabriel felt somewhat flattered that it felt so safe in his presence. No doubt it had ways to make sure that certain stimuli could awaken it, if it felt

it needed to.

Still, he moved slowly and carefully as he moved it to the bed, laying it down on the plush comforter, just in case.

He made his way to the other side of the bed, climbing onto it and lying on his back, dispelling his wings and halo so as to fit better.

"Oh," he grumbled. "You."

The mirror stared back down at him.

With an annoyed grunt, Gabriel closed his eyes to rid himself of the sight.

He still had plenty enough sensory input from his other senses to gauge if there was danger.

After all, it wasn't as though he was going to fall--

## Notes:

Please imagine the metal pipe clatter sound effect when V1 crumples to the ground.

## Chapter 7 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/53595460/chapters/135734302) : ...Perchance to Dream

## Summary:

Gabriel has nightmares.

" *They do not suffer," said Minos.*
*"They must," said Gabriel.*
*"Why must they suffer?" asked Minos.*
*"For they have sinned," answered Gabriel.*
*"Why must they suffer?" asked Minos.*
*"For it is Justice," answered Gabriel.*
*"Why must they suffer?" asked the king of the city of those who dared to love too deeply.*
*"For I have made it so," answered Gabriel.*
*"Why must they suffer?" asked a corpse with rotting, hollow eyes.*
*"For I can no longer unmake it," answered Gabriel.*
*"Why must they suffer?" asked Lucifer.*
*"For it is the will of God," answered God.*
*"And where is God?" asked Gabriel.*
*And no one answered.*

## Chapter 8 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/53595460/chapters/135735283) : All That They Can Drink (and It Will Never Be Enough)

## Summary:

V1 and Gabriel get an unpleasant reminder about the practicalities of running on blood.

## Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes (#chapter_8_endnotes) .)

V1's boot up sequence flickered to life across its optic.

It calibrated each system, running diagnostics as it did so.

The extended rest had done it a world of good.

Its repair programs had gotten to work, uninterrupted, on the parts of its body that saw constant wear while it was awake, like its arm and leg joints, fuel systems, and sensory processors.

Overtaxed power systems had had a chance to recover while in a low power state.

The hard reboot let it clear its caches, free up internal memory, and reset various internal processes in a fresh state.

It was a rare luxury to be able to power off completely. It left V1 completely unresponsive and unable to defend itself for upwards of eight hours, depending on the extent of the repairs it needed.

Internal clock said it had been almost nine.

Wow. That was a new record. It had really needed some sleep, apparently. Had it gotten any since arriving in Hell? It didn't think so.

Opening its optic shutters, it took a moment for V1 to reconcile what it saw with what it expected to see.

It saw…itself? And Gabriel?

What the hell…

Oh!

The mirror!

Right.

But that would mean it was…

V1 looked around to find it was, indeed, atop the heart shaped bed, with Gabriel lying beside it.

It turned to look at him, his chest rising and falling with each deep, rhythmic breath.

He was asleep, or so it seemed. He looked…peaceful. The constant tension that was usually held in his posture was gone.

V1 let its gaze wander over his sleeping form, lazily drinking in his beauty until it reached his--

*neck*

*throat*

*jugular vein*

*pulsing-throbbing-beating-*

*rushing blood beneath flesh so easy to tear -rip-scratch-so full of blood*

*blood blood blood*

A warning flashed on its HUD.

"FUEL LEVELS CRITICAL"

bloodfuel blood blood blood

It lashed out a claw and tore a gash across the Angel's throat, clambering on top of him and wrapping all four hands around his neck, seeping them in as much blood as it could.

BLOOD

FUEL

LIFE

FOOD

**BLOOD**

The Angel woke with a cry of pain that cut off into a gurgle as unwavering metal hands and his own blood choked him.

In a blinding flash of light, the precious source of fuel vanished, only to appear again, an instant later, behind V1, and before it could do more than turn to face him, tackled it to the bed, pinning it under his legs as he struggled to keep its three arms away from him with his handless arm while his hand grasped the wound on his throat.

Precious blood still gushed out between his fingers and onto V1, who writhed beneath him, desperately trying to get its hands back in the crimson flow. It splattered onto its chassis where the plating hungrily soaked it up.

**BLOOD BLOOD BLOOD LIFE BLOOD FUEL PLEASE BLOOD!**

*"Fuel levels stabilized"*

The alert flashed on its HUD and V1 suddenly snapped back to its senses, going instantly slack, its arms falling to the bed.

Gabriel wheezed around the blood clogging his throat. He coughed, blood dripping from the holes in his helmet as he did.

*"Machine!"* he choked, before being cut off by more hacking coughs, his lungs desperately trying to expel the fluid that had suddenly filled them.

Panicked, V1 began to reach for Gabriel but froze when his whole body tensed.

It pulled its hands back and pressed itself into the mattress, trying to show it wouldn't hurt him.

….any more than it already had.

A few more moments of squeezing the wound and another bout of horrible, wet coughing, at last Gabriel lowered his hand from the staunched gash.

"V1," he rasped. "Are you alright?"

V1 blinked.

Was *it* alright?!

Stupid, piece of shit, self sacrificing angel!

It squirmed in his grip trying to free itself from under him, and Gabriel obliged, climbing off of it and allowing it to scramble off the bed.

“V1…are you--”

Gabriel cut off abruptly as he dodged a vase thrown at his head.

“Hey!” he snapped.

V1 had never wanted a voice box more in its life.

So it could curse out that fucking, son of a bitch, god damned *idiot!*

Was *it* alright?!

No wonder he'd just sat there and let them rip the light of the Father from him! Probably would have let them tear his wings off, too, if they’d asked. Clearly, he’d have let them slit his throat!

Stupid stupid stupid!

Did he have any idea? *Any idea* how hard it was for a machine made to kill to be so concerned about keeping something else alive?

Had he even stopped to *consider* how much all of this went against the very basics of its programming? How stressful it was? How terrifying? This fear that it was too fundamentally against its nature to care for another? That, no matter how hard it tried, Gabriel would slip from between its fingers?

Or perish in their grip?

And yet, when forced to do the bare fucking minimum to try to protect himself, to do something to keep *himself* alive, what was his concern?

Was *IT* alright?!

It grabbed a decorative bowl off of an end table and lobbed it at the gaudy crosshair right in the middle of his dumb fucking face.

Gabriel dodged with ease and stood, wings flaring and filling the room with a blue glow.

“ENOUGH!” he cried, his voice reverberating the air around him.

In a blur of movement, he was across the room, lifting V1 by the arm.

V1 flailed against his grasp, beating against Gabriel's chest and arm with its other hands before all the fight drained out of it at once and it went limp, dangling from his grip like a lifeless doll.

“If I put you down, are you going to throw more things at me?”

V1 didn't respond, just hung, despondently, in the air.

“I'll take that as a ‘no’.”

V1 crumpled to its knees as it was set down, not even trying to stand.

There was a long moment of silence between the two of them.

“I'm not upset with you,” Gabriel said at last, making V1 wish it had something within arms reach to throw at him.

It settled for its best approximation of a glare.

“It was blood, wasn't it?” Gabriel asked. “You were starving. Low on fuel, I mean. That's what it was, wasn't it?”

V1 just nodded, listlessly.

“I didn't mean to fall asleep like that. I'd meant to stay awake, to rouse you when enough time passed that I expected you would need to feed. I was the one who offered to watch over you as you slept,” Gabriel said. “Instead I fell asleep and nearly let you starve.  I can't begrudge you for how your body acts in desperation.”

And yet he found it perfectly easy to condemn himself for the same.

Stupid.

“It takes more than that to kill an angel, you know that. You've put more grievous wounds on me, yourself, before. You've seen me shrug them.”

Stupid stupid stupid.

“Machine…V1, look at me.”

V1 did not look.

A gentle hand cupped the side of its head, guiding it up to where Gabriel knelt, beside it.

The hand moved to grasp V1’s feedbacker hand and guide it to the wound on his throat.

“Feel. The wound heals. And we are both still alive. We're alright.”

V1 ran feather-light fingers over the healing flesh, brushing away flecks of drying blood as it did so.

They were both still alive.

“Come, if you can’t be convinced you've not wronged me, then allow me to ask you for something as recompense?”

V1 nodded.

“Lie beside me, again?”

Gabriel's voice was soft, barely a whisper.

“I would sleep easier...with you at my side,” he breathed, quiet as though he feared the words would flee him if spoken too loudly.

Maybe, in a way, they would.

V1 nodded.

## Notes:

It is difficult to be built to kill and suddenly want to protect. Difficult to feel that ones nature defies ones desires. Difficult to feel as though those you want to protect would throw their lives away and there's nothing you could do about it. And difficult to hit an archangel with pottery at close range, even with a cross hair right in the middle of his face.

Red lettering is not supposed to indicate Hell, in this case, just V1's own blood lust.

Title is a line from the song 'Blood' by My Chemical Romance

## Chapter 9 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/53595460/chapters/135783739) : Next To Godliness

## Summary:

Gabriel thinks about what V1 means to him. V1 feels bad about trying to kill him in the middle of the night.

## Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes (#chapter_9_endnotes) .)

Sleep was nice.

Nightmares, not so much.

But sleep, itself?

Sleep was nice.

It settled over Gabriel like a warm weight, pulling him under into a gentle embrace of comfortable, temporary nothingness.

Fractured memories and regrets sometimes permeated his tranquil rest, but the sound of humming fans and shifting metal chased them away, lulling him back to oblivion.

When at last he roused from his slumber, he was curled up on his side, his wings folded around himself like a glowing blanket.

He sat up and stretched, with a yawn, flaring his wings before tucking them against his back. As he stretched his arms, he felt an uncomfortable sort of shifting of the skin. His old cuticle had begun to detach from his epidermis, digestive enzymes working to widen the gap, breaking down his armor from within, to give the new layer room to grow.

This was one of the more unpleasant stages of an, overall, largely unpleasant process. Like the entire surface of his body was one giant blister.

Eventually, the new cuticle would form and provide a buffer between his epidermis and the fluid filled gap between the old and new armor, gradually filling the space until it burst through the mostly digested old shell.

Until then, it was painful and deeply uncomfortable, especially as the cuticle first began to pull away from the skin. It didn’t do it all at once but, rather, slowly, over the course of a day or so, so bits of cuticle would detach as he moved, peeling up off his skin like the ripping off of a thousand tiny scabs.

Looking around himself, Gabriel noticed the conspicuous absence of a certain blue robot.

“Machine?” he called. “V1?”

No response. Well…not that it would have called back, obviously, being almost entirely mute, but, in any case, it did not make its presence known.

Probably hunting. After the events of the last night, Gabriel doubted it wanted to wake him to ask to feed.

He touched the dried blood on his neck where the gash had since fully healed.

Waking up from nightmares plaguing a sleep he did not mean to fall into to find his only ally and companion having slit his throat and seemingly trying to strangle him had been…jarring, to say the least.

He'd panicked for a moment, of course, but, as soon as he managed to pin it to the bed, it was clear it wasn't in its right mind.

The Machine could be ruthlessly efficient in its killing, with an arsenal of weapons at its disposal, including those built directly into its arms. Last night, it had been frantic and uncoordinated, arms flailing, not even trying to do more damage, just desperately trying to get at his blood.

As suddenly as it had begun, it was over, the frenzy that had overtaken it released its iron grip on its mind and it stilled.

Gabriel couldn't blame it for its actions when it was so clear it had not been in full control of its mind and body. If anyone was to blame, it was him.

It had been stupid and dangerous to fall asleep for so long, like that. They were both lucky that it was the Machine that had attacked him in the night, and not something with more actively malicious intent.

V1 hadn't seemed to see it that way.

Gabriel had never seen it so dejected. There had been nothing he could do to console it.

He could understand. Even if they'd put far more serious wounds on each other in battles and spars, it was another thing entirely to do so against one's own will.

Losing control of one's body, one's autonomy, that was something Gabriel could understand. It was terrifying and violating. He imagined that to cause harm to one you care about during such an episode only served to make it more horrifying.

He didn't fully understand why it was so upset with him for trying to forgive it too quickly, however. He understood the frustration of someone underplaying something one found very serious, but there had clearly been more to it than that.

He sighed. The barrier of communication again made understanding elude them. Not just from V1's lack of voice, but Gabriel's lack of proper words.

How could he have explained it to it?

The sudden waking to pain and violence had frightened him, of course, but its form, pinning him down, hands around his neck, his blood pulsing in both of their bodies had also been…*captivating.*

Gabriel had never struggled before V1. There were no obstacles that had ever been a true impediment to him. Nothing had ever been a challenge to overcome, simply a task to complete.

His only real suffering was that he brought onto himself as an expression of devotion to the Father and a test of his faith.

His existence had, for millennia, been a detached sort of facsimile of life. His existence was as his purpose, simply an expression of will.

That which he willed became so, as simply as choosing it.

Effortless.

Sterile.

Empty.

V1 made him struggle. Made him fail and, in failing, learn what it was to yearn to succeed. Made him fall and, in falling, learn to rise.

V1 was spit blood and broken bone. It was screamed curses and breathless laughter. It was the animal drive to survive, to bite and scratch and rip life back from the jaws of a universe threatening to swallow you whole. It was hunger and the joy of sating it, pain and the triumph of pushing through it, lust and the ecstasy of surrendering to it.

V1 was…life. Living. The raw feeling of knowing one was alive and the drive to keep living.

It took his divine form and tore it open and made him know he was flesh and blood. Made him look into the meat of himself and see that it was hideous, to see that it was beautiful.

How could he explain how that animal side of it captivated him without trivializing, or worse, *romanticizing*, the loss of control that had scared it so badly?

How to admit how he'd happily let it flay him alive, feeling it gorge that animal hunger on his blood while raw, white hot pain blazed through him like lighting--

Gabriel sucked in a sharp breath as a lurching sort of feeling twisted deep in his gut before settling to a dull ache.

He suddenly noticed how fast he was breathing, how very warm his body had become.

Oh.

Right.

*That* aspect of this whole molting ordeal.

He flipped onto his stomach and buried his face in the mattress with a groan.

That's what this was all going to lead to, wasn't it? That's what he'd explained after his last molt. That's what the Machine had made very clear it quite enthusiastically agreed to.

The fact that, once this damned shell came off, Gabriel was going to become some kind of lust crazed maniac throwing himself at it and begging to be fucked.

On a bed shaped like a heart.

God, how embarrassing!

He rolled to lie on his side.

It had been so easy to fantasize about it, then! When the afterglow of his first ever climax was still washing over him and V1 was tapping intoxicating little rhythms across his chest and millennia of guilt and shame were still being overpowered by a wave of pleasant brain chemicals.

So easy to let it go unspoken, afterwards, when it was some event in the indeterminate future that might not even ever happen.

Now it was real and concrete and approaching so damn fast! And he was just supposed to sort out every complicated feeling he had about it in only a week's time, all while it continued to be agonizingly unspoken?

Everything he'd ever been taught told him to be ashamed, everything in his body told him to rejoice. He knew which one he wanted to listen to, now, but a lifetime of stringent, restrictive dogma doesn't go away just because you don't believe it anymore.

Out of the corner of his vision, he caught a glimpse of a reflection in the mirror above. A heavenly being no longer worthy of Heaven, but still burdened by the shackles of its doctrine.

With an annoyed huff, he flicked out a wing and used it to cover his face, blocking out the view.

He wanted this. That he knew with absolute certainty. He wanted the Machine's touch on every inch of his new skin, taking his inexperienced hands in its and guiding him to rapture. He wanted that.

Maybe that was enough. He'd spent so much of his life not knowing what he wanted, not knowing how to want. Maybe it was enough to know, without a doubt in his mind, that he wanted this.

Or maybe he'd fumble the whole debacle so badly he'd have no other option but to throw himself into the Styx.

Well, at least, either way, he'd be getting wet.

Gabriel suddenly considered the feasibility of taking out his own brain and throwing it very hard against a wall.

Thankfully, he was spared from any attempted self-encephalectomy by the sound of approaching footsteps.

He quickly sat up.

“Machine?” he called.

V1’s glowing eye peeked out from around the door frame to the bedroom, hesitating.

“If you’re worried I’ve spontaneously changed my mind and decided to be angry with you for last night, I haven’t,” Gabriel said.

V1 hesitated for a moment more before entering the room fully. It placed what appeared to be a bucket down next to the door, then held something out to Gabriel.

“Ah, more food?” Gabriel asked, accepting the offering and sitting on the side of the bed so he could place it in his lap to free up his hand.

He inspected the hunk of meat. Not from a filth, certainly. The flesh was far too red, with a cracked sort of covering of white, like bone or calcified muscle.

“A…stray?” he asked. It would be an odd coloration, but the exposed muscle and bits of bone were consistent with that of the lower husks.

V1 made a “so-so” gesture, then mimed cocking its arm like a shotgun.

“One of those augmented strays, then. A…soldier, are they called?”

V1 nodded, sitting itself down on the floor.

Another husk. Augmented in strength and resilience it might have been, but still less than an animal in intelligence.

Sufficient to quell the protests of his conscience, he supposed. Now, to see if it could sate the protests of his stomach.

No need to crack open his mandibles, this time. He simply unlatched the hook that held them together when closed.

He tore off a piece of the hardened white covering and took an experimental nibble.

He let out a pleased chirping sound.

His suspicion had been correct. Calcified flesh. Meat that had been mineralized until it was nearly as hard as bone, and as rich with calcium.

“Thank you,” he hummed.

Had V1 noticed how he’d favored the bones of the last meal and chosen a target accordingly?

How…unexpectedly thoughtful. It took Gabriel slightly aback. He wasn't really used to small acts of kindness towards him, like that.

He noticed the Machine staring, tilting its head at him.

Feeling suddenly self conscious, he paused in his eating.

“Um…something wrong?” he asked.

V1 shook its head, but continued its confused staring.

It narrowed the lenses of its optic, seemingly focusing on something, then produced a quick, mechanical chirping sound.

It looked at him, pointedly.

Gabriel started chewing on another piece of flesh, awkwardly.

“I'm…not sure I follow…”

V1 pointed at Gabriel, then repeated the noise.

“Oh! You mean, I made a sound like that?” Gabriel asked.

V1 nodded.

“I hadn't even realized,” Gabriel admitted, sheepishly taking another bite of food. “The sound is from forcing air out through these, very quickly.”

He gestured to the three small holes on the bottom part of both sides of his face.

“They're called ‘spiracles’. They're how I breathe,” he explained. “My voice comes from my throat but if I expel air out of these I can sort of…”

Gabriel took a deep breath and let out a rapid series of chirps, almost like buzzing.

“I can affect the pitch by fully or partially closing the spiracles, technically, but I, uh, generally just try to avoid doing it at all.”

V1 tilted its head.

“It's…kind of embarrassing,” Gabriel said. “It's considered somewhat uncouth in Heaven. To chirp like a bird or a bug or something. I didn't realize I'd even done it. I was just…happy. I guess. Excited.”

He paused for a moment.

“Silly, I suppose, really,” he said, voice distant. “To be ashamed of a noise you make from joy. I suppose it's just another thing I'm meant to be ‘above’.”

V1 just looked at him for a moment, then pointed at his face and gave a thumbs up. It tapped the sides of its head roughly equivalent to the places on Gabriel's where his spiracles were and gave another thumbs up.

“You like them?” Gabriel asked with a bemused chuckle.

V1 nodded.

“Well, I'm flattered,” Gabriel said. “Perhaps I won't be so careful about not making them in the future. I like your sounds as well, if it means anything.”

V1 squinted its optic happily and drew in a few, rhythmic gusts of air through its exhaust fans, making a noise akin to laughter.

When Gabriel finished eating and latched his mandibles closed, he asked “What's the bucket for?”

V1 stood and brought the bucket over to him.

It was filled with water and a cloth that looked like it had been torn from a larger piece of fabric.

V1 pointed at the bucket, then to its own neck, then to Gabriel.

Gabriel's hand went to his throat and felt the dried blood there.

“Oh. Very considerate of you, Machine,” he said. “Thank you.”

V1 shrugged.

Gabriel leaned down, took the rag from the edge of the bucket and dunked it in the water. He wrung out the excess and sat back up, hissing in discomfort as the movement caused a part of his cuticle to detach from his skin.

V1 perked up with apparent concern.

“I'm fine,” Gabriel assured. “My current armor is just beginning to detach from the skin beneath to make room for the new. It's…unpleasant. But not harmful.”

V1 held out its hand, gesturing for the rag.

“Oh, no, I assure you, I'm fine! I'm quite capable of…”

V1’s glare made Gabriel’s words trail off.

He cleared his throat.

“Right. There's no virtue in refusing assistance freely offered,” he reminded himself.

He handed the rag to V1.

V1 brought the cloth to his neck and gently began to scrub away the blood dried there. It paid special attention to the place where the gash itself had been, though there was no trace of it now.

Gabriel stayed obediently still as it moved down to clean his chest. The armor there had already begun to dull, losing its normal gleam.

It was somewhat unnecessary, really, since he'd just be shredding all of this anyway, but it didn't hurt to be more hygienic, when possible.

*"Cleanliness is next to godliness"* and all that.

There was something pleasant about it, as well, having someone who did not balk at the blood that stained him and that was willing to help him be clean of it.

The gentle scrubbing itself felt nice, as well.

The Machine dunked the rag in the water and wrung it out again, turning the contents of the bucket a dull reddish hue.

It hesitated as it brought the rag to Gabriel's face, waiting for his permission.

He gave it with a soft nod.

Gently but thoroughly, V1 cleaned the bottom half of his face.

Gabriel held the inner openings of his spiracles closed as V1 brought the rag over them, then puffed out a small amount of air, spritzing V1 with the tiny bit of water that was left behind in the holes themselves.

V1 narrowed its optic lenses and recoiled like a cat being spayed with a spray bottle, then glared as Gabriel chuckled.

It flicked some water from its fingertips into Gabriel's helmet in retaliation, causing Gabriel to let out a full laugh.

V1 made a sound like a laugh as well, but it quickly faded.

It put the rag back into the now somewhat bloodied water and ran a hand over Gabriel's throat, as if trying to find some remnant of the wound that had been there.

Its wings drooped, humming sadly.

"I don't understand," Gabriel said, heart breaking at the sight of his companion so defeated. "I *want* to understand, but I don't. I'm not upset with you. I'm not permanently injured. Why is this so important to you, V1?"

V1 looked up at him, then back down at his throat, and its own hands.

The discordant buzzing and feedback that preceded an attempt at speech played, then it said:

"Y O U S C A R E D".

Its hands fell to its sides in defeat.

"I don't mean to keep scaring you," Gabriel said. "And I don't mean to dismiss your concerns. I just don't understand why you seem to blame yourself so deeply for this. You can't help your nature."

V1 stood abruptly, flaring its wings.

It reached into the glowing light of the blades and pulled out the pistol, tossing it roughly to the floor, followed by the shotgun, the nail gun, the rail cannon, the rocket launcher.

Finally, it tore the knucklebaster from its socket, along with the whiplash, throwing them down hard enough that they bounced off the floor with a clatter.

Gabriel got to his feet, alarmed by V1's sudden act of self destruction, but the Machine stepped back, away from him.

It waved its arms, gesturing between each piece of its discarded artillery, then gestured, desperately, to itself, beating its two remaining hands against its chest, then falling to its knees.

***"N A T U R E!"***

The word came out strangled and pained, like a scream.

Its nature.

It could throw away every gun and blade, tear off every limb, but it could not rid itself of what it was, at its core.

A weapon built for a war that ended before it was completed. A remnant of death brought into a world that had instead craved peace. Never meant to hold something, delicately, for itself.

Gabriel knelt before the Machine.

"Forgive me," he said. "I've not meant to be cruel to you, but it is a terrible cruelty I've put upon you, indeed."

He looked around at the discarded weapons.

"You were never made to feel the fear of loss, and yet I've instilled it in you, and it is a fear one can never be truly free of again. To care is to fear. It was never in your nature to do either."

V1 did not look at him.

"And yet, you do," Gabriel said, taking V1's hand in his. "Your nature is that of a weapon. That can't be changed. But a weapon is only as malicious as how it is wielded."

He guided V1's hand to his throat, again, and its gaze followed.

“These hands were built to crush. Yet, feel how, beneath them, I still draw breath? We are more than our purposes, Machine. You’ve shown me that, well enough,” he said.

He sighed.

“It is my nature, as well, to be wielded. As both sword and shield. Destroyer and defender. It is sometimes…difficult to remember that I am, myself, something I must defend. I will…take care, in the future. To better protect what you seem to hold so dearly.”

V1 seemed satisfied with his promise. It raised its hand to his face, fingers exploring its edges.

Its fingers lingered over the center of his “chin”, where his mandibles fit together, seemingly trying to feel the nearly imperceptible seam there.

Gabriel unlatched his mandibles and let them fall open while V1 watched in obvious fascination.

It touched the sharp edges of his jaws with a careful delicacy, feeling their sturdiness.

It jumped slightly in surprise as one of the thin, segmented appendages within Gabriel's mouth brushed against its fingers, but did not pull away, instead turning its hand to better inspect the almost antenna-like structure.

“My palps,” Gabriel said. “I've two sets and can move them more or less independently. They help me manipulate food as well as being sensory. Somewhat analogous to a tongue, I suppose. Though I can smell as well as taste with them.”

Another one of the palps joined the first in gently caressing V1’s fingertips.

“You taste like blood…and metal…” Gabriel said, breathing deeply. “Though I suppose that's hardly a surprise.”

V1's fingers moved to brush against what almost seemed like an upper lip.

“Labrum,” Gabriel said.

V1 moved to a slightly jagged structure on the side of his mouth.

“Maxilla. Two of my palps attach there.”

Down to the complicated structure that served like a lower lip.

“Labium.”

V1 looked up and moved its optic lens up and down in a motion akin to waggling one's eyebrows.

Gabriel gave its fingers a playful nip with his mandibles.

“Hush, you,” he scolded. “It just means ‘lips’.”

More waggling.

If Gabriel had eyes, he would have been rolling them, but he also couldn't hold back an amused laugh.

“Incorrigible beast. Remember whose fingers are in whose jaws,” he warned, but the threat had no vitriol behind it.

V1 chuckled, impishly.

It was a very nice sound.

## Notes:

"Google, how do I explain to my situationship that it losing control and slitting my throat was kinda hot without invalidating its feelings?"

## Chapter 10 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/53595460/chapters/135845203): I Was Napping, and So Gently You Came Rapping, and So Faintly You Came Tapping

## Summary:

Gabriel is enjoying being lazy. Gabriel is not enjoying being unsure where his relationship with V1 stands.

## Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes (#chapter_10_endnotes).)

Gabriel slept again, even longer than the previous time. V1 woke him once to feed, not leaving his side the whole night.

A quick slice across the palm was far preferable to a slit throat.

Pre-molt fatigue was settling in heavily and Gabriel wanted to do nothing but lie in bed, drifting lazily in and out of sleep. Luckily, he had an unprecedented opportunity to do just that.

Splayed out on his stomach, wings hanging over the sides of the bed, he was the picture of slothfulness, something he'd have felt a tremendous amount of guilt for in the past, but now, feeling so wonderfully comfortable and safe, he couldn't care less.

All of his body's energy was being used on the molt. That, mixed with the cocktail of chemicals and hormones his brain was producing, left him feeling blissfully relaxed and carefree. It was like the rough edges of his thoughts had been smoothed down, unable to prick and prod at him.

He knew it was just his body trying to make sure he stayed put and didn't go wandering off somewhere exposed and dangerous before his molt, like he had last time, but he was learning to accept appreciating a pleasant sensation at face value. No virtue in needless suffering or guilt.

There was one downside to his nigh-hedonistic repose, however.

Gabriel let out a yelp as a languid stretch suddenly peeled a sizable piece of cuticle up from his epidermis.

His lack of frequent movement meant that his cuticle was not detaching in small parts constantly, leading to larger pieces painfully detaching all at once.

"Ow…"

V1 ran to his side, concern obvious.

"I'm fine," Gabriel assured, trying to wave off its concern, but only serving to increase it as the motion caused another piece to detach and he hissed in pain. "It's painful. But not harmful. It needs to happen."

V1 tapped on its chest, tilting its head.

"...You?" Gabriel asked, trying to determine its meaning.

V1 paused, seeming to contemplate how to get across what it meant to convey.

It whirred loudly before producing a single, garbled word.

*"H E L P"*

It looked to Gabriel again.

"Help…you? You help? Oh. You want to help me?"

V1 nodded.

"Hmm…tapping on the shell can help it detach less painfully," he said. "I've done it to encourage particularly stubborn bits before. Here, let me just…"

He dispelled his wings, giving V1 room to climb onto the bed next to him.

V1 gently drummed its fingers on the center of Gabriel's back but stopped when Gabriel gasped.

"No, no, don't stop," Gabriel said. "I was just surprised. It feels nice."

Reassured it wasn't hurting him, V1 resumed its tapping. Gabriel felt the vibrations of it all through his armor, gently working the parts that had not yet detached up from the skin.

He sucked in a breath as three more hands (all since reattached after V1's impromptu "unequipping" of them) joined in the ministrations, letting it out as a contented sigh. The reverberations seemed to caress him, massaging his weary body and releasing tension that had been held for eons.

"Thank you…" he breathed. "That feels…heavenly."

He chuckled, breathily, at the irony of it. Heaven would have never approved of such a display.

Well, to Hell with them.

He lay his head against his arm and let himself enjoy the work of V1's deft fingers. He felt…so lovely. Like a warm softness enveloped his mind and body.

Molting never usually felt like this. It was generally a time of stress, anxiety, and discomfort. A time where having anyone near him made his skin crawl, quite literally. Something more like what he'd experienced with his last molt: an encroaching sense of doom and suffocation, punctuated by periods of painful exhaustion.

Nothing like this. This fuzzy sort of happiness and comfort. Was it because he'd had food? Or because he'd made sure he properly rested? It wasn't the first time he'd done either of those things, though…

Then…was it really just because he had V1 here? Normally, though, he'd have certainly not been comforted by another's presence, even one he held dear.

Was it because…because his body viewed V1 as something intended to be closeby afterwards? As…a mate?

He grimaced internally at the wording. Something about it stirred a feeling in him he didn't want to identify.

A lover, then?

While less embarrassing and off-putting, that word scared him more.

Was that what they were? Lovers? Was it fair to call them that?

Gabriel wasn't sure he'd call what they'd done "making love" as much as "desperately groping". As nice as it had been, it was hardly something he'd consider "romantic".

He wasn't even sure what, if anything, V1 got out of all this, besides the knowledge it was helping its ally. It seemed to at least…enjoy the process, last time, but Gabriel shuddered to think it got nothing but a sense of helpful satisfaction out of it.

He supposed it didn't really matter, in the end. They both got what they needed, it shouldn't matter to him if what it got was analogous to what he did.

But Gabriel had a habit of not sticking to what was supposed to matter to him.

He didn't want to think about that, now. He just wanted to let himself enjoy the sensation of tapping reverberating through his skin as he gently slipped back into sleep.

## Notes:

Did you know that skeleton shrimp play tippy tappy on a perspective mate's shell to determine if they're ready to molt?

I knew that. And it's what inspired basically this entire fanfic.

Title is from the poem The Raven, though the vibes are very different here.

## Chapter 11 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/53595460/chapters/135845329): Meat and Machinery

## Summary:

Ouuuuuuughhh there has GOT to be a way to FUCK that weird BUG

## Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes (#chapter_11_endnotes).)

If V1 didn't fuck this Angel soon it was going to lose its Goddamned mind.

It lay, staring at the mirrored ceiling, its own glowing optic beaming back at it.

*"This is what you get for getting involved with a divine being, you dumb cunt,"* it seemed to scold it. *"On top of that, he's Catholic, in the sense that he is a **literal part of the Catholic canon!** What did you expect? Uncomplicated physical intimacy? Go fuck yourself."*

Gabriel lay next to it, looking exquisitely recumbent, posed and perfect like an oil painting, as per usual, and blissfully unaware of V1's internal struggle.

Could he have had any idea how hard it had been, restraining itself, when tapping on his armor had elicited all those beautiful little sighs and tiny *stupidly adorable* fucking chirping noises he probably still didn't realize he was making?

How badly it wanted to drag all of its hands across every inch of him, to make him moan and shout again, to destroy every last bit of shame and self restraint he had until he was pleading and rutting against it again, desperate for every last bit of pleasure it could give him?

To taste his blood, flooded with so many delicious chemicals, so hot and pure like bottled lightning? All blood fueled the same but that didn't mean feeding on all blood *felt* the same. And Gabriel's…

*Ouuuggggghhhh!* It wanted to tear open its chest and pull out all the meat mixed in with its circuitry until all the hungers it instilled in it quieted and gave it some brief moment of peace.

Who put meat in robots, anyway?! What the fuck was wrong with them?! No wonder they all ended up in Hell! Fuck off!

Or maybe it wasn't even from the meat. Maybe it came from the machinery. Stupid, sexy machinery.

All it knew was it had a need to see that Angel whimpering underneath it that bordered on pathological.

He knew, didn't he? He knew what it meant that V1 was here. He'd said so. He'd made *explicitly sure* that V1 understood what it meant for it to be here and what that would lead to. And yet here they were, lying in the same stupid heart shaped bed, not once mentioning what was supposed to happen when Gabriel's old skin came off.

He hadn't changed his mind, had he? He wouldn't have. He would have said something, at least, right? Even *he* wasn't *that* repressed.

Well…

No. Repressed or not, he'd have said something.

…Right?

## Notes:

Sudden jumps in tone are my absolute favorite things to write, next to exceedingly purple prose so the jump from Gabriel's internal dilemma about whether or not its fair of him to want V1 to have feelings directly analogous to his own, despite its nature being so different than his, to V1 just staring at the ceiling thinking "I HAVE TO FIND A WAY TO FUCK THIS MAN RIGHT NOW IMMEDIATELY" is probably my favorite transition in the whole fic.

## Chapter 12 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/53595460/chapters/135846049) : I Want You to Want Me

## Summary:

The sexual tension you could cut with a knife finally is broken. Thank God. The fic begins to properly earn the E for Explicit rating.

## Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes (#chapter_12_endnotes) .)

By the fourth day of his preparation to molt, Gabriel noticed several troubling developments.

First and foremost being that the soft, warm feelings of contentedness he'd been feeling were beginning to change into something altogether more…salacious.

Heat pooled in his gut, at first a tiny ember, now sitting like a smoldering coal at his core, filling him with a low, steady heat.

When he fed, tasting the coppery blood of the gifts the Machine brought him, it raised to a fever.

Under the Machine's touch, as it tapped agonizingly pleasurable rhythms all through his body, ember turned to flame, threatening to consume him.

The unspoken words between them seemed to stifle the air, suffocating and omnipresent. Silence begged to be broken, like fractured glass holding back an ocean, only held in place by fear of drowning.

Secondly: growing a new hand ITCHED.

Technically he'd known that already but it had been a very *very* long time since he'd regrown a limb, he'd forgotten just how *bad* it got.

He gnawed on the stump where his hand had been, trying to relieve the incessant itching.

V1 slapped the back of his head and glared, disapprovingly.

"It's my arm, I'll chew on it if I like," Gabriel said, petulantly, not needing to stop chewing to do so.

V1 made a motion with its head clearly meant to resemble rolling its eyes. It leaned forward to try to pull Gabriel's arm away from his jaws.

Gabriel pulled away and scooted backwards, away from V1 on the bed, gnawing faster.

With an outraged whirring sound, V1 pursued him, but Gabriel turned and held his arm out of reach, trying to get as much itching in before he inevitably lost their childish squabble.

Instead of making another grab for his arm, V1 opted to start drumming against his side with his fingers, causing him to shiver and drop his arm from his mouth in shock.

V1 pressed its advantage and joined two of its other hands into its assault, fingers clinking against the metal of his armor, while the fourth hand cradled his back, leading him down to a lying position.

"Haah…I always forget…what a dirty fighter you are…" Gabriel gasped, allowing himself to be manhandled, despite his weak attempts at complaint.

The drumming against his shell turned the heat in his gut molten and Gabriel breathed heavily, just trying not to be consumed by it.

It must have known. It must have known what it was doing to him, how it was destroying him. There's no way it couldn't know.

The uncertainty tore at him almost as strongly as the liquid fire spreading to every inch of his skin. He couldn't take it anymore!

The sharp claw of the knuckleblaster dragged slightly harder against his shell and something in Gabriel snapped. Like a bowstring loosed, he struck.

In a flash, he grabbed the Machine and flipped it onto its back, reversing their positions, pinning it down under his hips.

His mandibles unlatched and his jaws spread wide before he lunged towards V1's neck.

Vicious jaws capable of snapping bone and tearing flesh scraped delicately over the metal of the underside of V1's head, inner mouthparts touching, feeling, and tasting. With a fastidiousness that bordered on obsessive, the complicated mechanisms of flesh and chitin cleaned away bits of blood, rust, and sand, gently but thoroughly grooming what served for the Machine's jawline.

Gabriel didn't know what he was doing or why, all he knew was it felt good, that something in him desperately wanted to reciprocate the attention the Machine had been giving him and he no longer cared to understand the specifics.

His legs squeezed around V1's form, beneath him, and he fought to keep himself from grinding against its pelvis.

With a gasp, he leaned back and stared into its eye, holding its shoulder for support.

*"Tell me you want this,"* he begged. "Tell me you want what's happening. What's going to happen. Tell me you know and you want this like I want it. That it's not just…not just helping an ally. Tell me this does something more for you than that. Tell me you feel what I'm feeling."

He pressed his forehead to the rim of V1's optic.

"Because if you don't. Then I need you to leave. *Right now*." Gabriel struggled to get the words out between panting breaths, his voice bordering on a whine. "*Because I can't control myself around you any longer.*"

He leaned back, looking, desperately, to V1, for any reaction.

It blinked, then made a low whirring sound like a gentle chuckle.

Raising its hands to each side of his head, it nodded, slowly and deliberately, then guided his face back down to the crook of its neck.

Gabriel let out a sound that was nearly a sob, relief flooding him. He let instinct take over as he gently nibbled over wires and metal, jaws feeling where they could bite clean through, severing circuits and wrending metal, but instead just caressed and cleaned.

He pressed his body against V1's, grinding his crotch against its, warmth and pleasure radiating out from the point of their contact as he did so.

V1 wrapped its arms around him as his hips settled into a rhythm of gyration. He noted the way it stilled and shivered as his palps brushed over different wires and tubing. Experimentally, he gave one particularly coppery tasting wire a harder nibble.

V1 thrust upward, clinging to him with a sudden whine, its arms momentarily losing their grip and it clambered to get a hold of him again, seemingly shocked by its own reaction.

The sudden collision made Gabriel shout, the shock of pleasure making him see stars for a moment.

Falling back to the mattress, V1 grabbed the sides of Gabriel's helmet and pressed his face harder against its neck, the fingers of its other hands drumming frantically against his back.

Gabriel needed no words to understand a demand for more.

He focused his attention on wires his palps could taste electricity coursing strongly beneath. He scraped over one with a jagged edge of his maxilla while his palps continued brushing against another, all while his hips continued their rhythmic grinding.

V1's fans kicked into overdrive and one of its legs wrapped around his waist, as if four arms had not been enough to cling to him with.

Gabriel felt climax coiling in his gut and he bit hard into the wire, sending an electrical shock up his jaw. It tasted like lightning and ozone.

A massive shudder wracked V1's body and it threw its head back with a garbled electronic sound.

Its pelvis pressed up against Gabriel's and he tipped over into climax, far softer and gentler than his last, more relief than rapture, but heavenly in its own right.

With an exhausted huff, Gabriel let himself fall on top of V1, hooking his mandibles closed again.

"Are you…alright?" he asked, out of breath. "I don't really know what that wire was that I bit."

V1 gave a weak thumbs up, before flopping its arm back down to the mattress.

Gabriel laughed and positioned himself to be spooning V1 instead of partially crushing it. He summoned his wings and wrapped them both, casting the room into hues of blue and gold.

## Notes:

Gabriel somehow still managing to be shocked and relieved when the partner he has had sex with before, who explicitly agreed to having sex with him in this circumstance if it should arise, and who brought him to the literal city of Lust to an apartment with a giant heart shaped bed confirms it does, indeed, want to have sex with him.

He's doing his best.

When I posted my anatomical diagram of Gabriel's mouthparts on my tumblr, someone reblogged it and said "I imagine Gabriel would preen V1 with his mouthparts but that's probably just because I like birds so much". Meanwhile I already had this chapter written. The inherent human desire to see a funny bug social groom their lover.

The rest of the chapters are fairly short and simple from here on out. Most of the deep existentialism will be exchanged for these two being horny and stupid.

Fellas, is it gay to lovingly groom the homies to prevent the spread of deadly fungal spores and to help them acquire the colony scent, affirming their place in the complex social hierarchy?

## Chapter 13 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/53595460/chapters/135913798) : The Ghost in Its Own Machine

## Summary:

V1 would like to go out and kill things for fun and fuel. Gabriel would like to cuddle in bed until the stars burn out. He's very persuasive.

## Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes (#chapter_13_endnotes) .)

Now given permission, both by V1 and his own insecurities, Gabriel clung to V1 like a second skin nearly constantly, his larger frame almost completely encircling it as he curled around it on the bed.

V1 hadn’t been aware anyone could be so touch starved. At least he seemed to be making up for lost time, now. It certainly wasn’t complaining.

Well, maybe a little bit.

Gabriel seemed to have no interest in letting it get up or go anywhere and, not being an angel or other kind of weird bug preparing for a molt, V1 was not content to be asleep or otherwise in bed nearly all day.

It was bored and wanted to go kill things.

It tried shimmying its way out of Gabriel’s sleeping arms, but his grip only tightened around it.

“Don’t…” Gabriel mumbled, sleepily.

V1 tapped on a fuel line, insistently, managing to pull itself away from Gabriel enough to sit up. It needed to feed.

“Stay,” Gabriel insisted, leaning up on his elbows.

He opened his mandibles and used them to slice open the flesh of his palm and press it to V1’s chest.

“Here. Feed on me.”

Feeding from Gabriel was like the feeling of sunlight on skin. Radiant, in every sense of the word. Somewhere within V1, its flesh still remembered the sensation, even if V1 could have never known it, like cell memory from a transplanted organ.

Warm, wonderful blood flowed into V1’s plating but it tried to stay resolute.

It needed more than just blood. It was getting restless, cooped up like this.

However, its resolve melted away in an instant as Gabriel began to gently groom its neckline, mouthparts scraping tenderly against its wires and plating. Maybe…maybe it could stand to be cooped up just a bit longer.

It let Gabriel guide it back down to the mattress.

The series of happy clicking sounds he made made it impossible for V1 to be upset.

V1 had originally been somewhat frightened when Gabriel had pinned it down and opened up his jaws like he planned to eat it alive (along with some…*other* emotions it felt at the sight, anyway).

It had been pleasantly surprised at how nice the grooming felt, since Gabriel clearly seemed to enjoy it. It had expected welcoming him to continue would get across its enthusiastic agreement.

What it had *not* expected was its own reaction to his biting at its wires.

All its warning systems had lit up like a fireworks show, giving it an overloaded dose of its artificial adrenaline but, because of its intense trust of Gabriel, its programming recognized no possible threat and therefore registered it as having overcome whatever peril had triggered the chemicals, instantly shifting them to its self reward centers. It was as if all the mental reward from a massive fight completed with perfect style hit it all at once in a fraction of a second.

V1 was a machine. It could trace what signals initiated what lines of its coding.

But it was also organic. It had flesh that lived and grew inside it. Flesh that had memory and feeling embedded deep in its dna. Flesh that knew the feeling of being warmed by the sun. Of the taste of blood and the smell of grass. Literal and metaphorical wires would cross and completely unrelated code would cause secondhand senses to trigger, sometimes without warning or explanation, like echoes of long forgotten memories.

The ghost in its own machine.

And it remembered the feeling of being hit with an orgasm like a semi truck.

Which is a lot like what having Gabriel bite into its wires had felt like.

Stupid, sexy machinery, indeed.

It really should try to get up. It didn't have much time before Gabriel would be close enough to molting that it wouldn't be able to leave his side until it was over.

If V1 wanted some fresh air, so to speak, this would be the opportunity.

Just as it considered an escape route, Gabriel's hand, now healed, slid down its plating to thumb at the hydraulics of its inner thigh, whispering filthy promises against its neck.

It let his hand push its thigh to the side, reaching exploratory fingers into the gap and against the thick bundles of chords there, thumb scratching against the tubing of one of its blood fuel lines.

It hooked its other leg around Gabriel's, arching up into his touch.

…It could get fresh air later.

## Notes:

V1, being pinned down and seeing Gabriel opening his crazy bug jaws and lunging for its throat: "Well mark me down as scared AND horny!"

Apparently, when people get organ transplants, sometimes the behavior of that organ will remain consistent with how it functioned in the donor, instead of the recipient. So someone who got a kidney transplant might have their bathroom schedule change. It's not well understood but raises questions about where memory and instruction for organ functions are stored: purely in the brain, or in the cells and dna of the organs themselves. Some people even insist they've noticed personality changes after major organ transplants, though it's unclear whether its just a result of the emotional impact of surgery that major.

In any case, it makes me wonder: whose dna is in the flesh within machines? How was it grown? How was it harvested and installed? If they can heal themselves, it must still be growing and repairing itself. It must be alive. Do the genetic memories and impulses from that dna follow even into a body that can't use them?

I just don't think you can stuff a bunch of flesh, blood, and organs into a GoPro without it getting some weird and unexpected side effects from that.

## Chapter 14 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/53595460/chapters/135913915) : Obligatory Nine Inch Nails Reference

## Summary:

Gabriel's molt is coming soon and he's uncomfortable. But not too uncomfortable to tease V1 with his stupid sexy voice.

## Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes (#chapter_14_endnotes) .)

The sixth day since Gabriel severed his hand from his wrist and started the molting process was an unwelcome return to form, in terms of how his molts usually felt.

Which was to say, painful and uncomfortable.

“It will be soon, I think,” Gabriel said, in between labored breaths, lying on his back in bed. “Either tomorrow or the day after. I can feel my spiracles prepare to detach. It's…hard to breathe.”

V1 whirred, sadly, concerned for the ailing angel.

Gabriel's armor had grown dull and even flaky in places, creaking and popping when he moved, and the maddening itch of his growing hand had changed to a throbbing pain as the mostly reformed appendage was crammed into the far too small space of his old shell.

V1 put a wet cloth over where his shell strained against the building pressure within, providing Gabriel at least a small modicum of relief.

“Thank you,” he breathed.

V1 cupped a hand around Gabriel's cheek and Gabriel raised his own hand to lie on top of it, leaning into its touch.

“I'll be through this soon enough. And quite happy to have had you there with me, through it,” he said.

“And *very* glad to *have* you there, afterwards,” he added, in a sly tone.

He chuckled at the way V1's wings perked up at his weak attempt at sounding sultry.

“Well, I may be unpracticed in the art of seduction but, lucky for me, you're easy to woo.”

V1 chirped, indignantly, glaring at him and shaking its head.

“You don't think so? You don't think I can tell what my voice does to you?” Gabriel teased. “I'm inexperienced, Machine. Not blind.”

V1 folded its arms, obstinately.

Gabriel took a deep breath and propped himself up on his good arm, fixing his gaze on V1.

“*I want you.* I want to tear open your metal casing with my jaws and taste the profane gore that sustains you,” he said, voice low and velvety. “I want every drop of your blood, every scrap of your metal and flesh. To reach into you and drag out your wires so all you can feel, all you can know, is my touch.”

He got to his knees, starting straight into V1's eye.

“And I want you to tear me open in turn. To rend my armor apart and dig into my insides until you find the hollow, empty place the Father's Light once was and tear out whatever scrap of divinity still lingers there so that all there is in me is you. Is our pain. Our passion.”

He leaned forward, face beside V1's, as if leaning into its ear, his voice a husky whisper.

“I want you to hold me on the brink of death so you can make me know what it is to be alive. I want to feel you kicking and scratching beneath me until your name tastes like blood in my mouth.”

He pressed his head to the side of V1’s and hissed *“I want to fuck you like an animal.”*

V1 shivered and let out a garbled, mechanical whirring.

Gabriel sat back with a laugh.

“See? Easy.”

V1 blinked and shook itself, trying to regain its wits, then glared again.

Apparently it didn't think that qualified as “easy”.

Gabriel laid back down with a grunt of effort.

“Whatever you say,” he said, a laugh still in his voice.

V1 slapped his face with the wet cloth.

## Notes:

Is it even a real Ultrakill fanfiction if you don't find some way to hamfist a lyric from "Closer"?

## Chapter 15 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/53595460/chapters/135914410) : You Have to Crack the Shell to Get at the Nut, So to Speak

## Summary:

Oh boy, explicit sexual content!

## Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes (#chapter_15_endnotes) .)

On the seventh day, one week from the beginning of the process, Gabriel awoke to a blazing heat across his skin and a feeling akin to panic gripping his heart.

The walls suddenly felt like they were closing in. He couldn't breathe!

He sat up and shook himself, forcing the panic down.

He could breathe, it was just harder. The walls weren't closing in, his skin was just getting too tight. He was fine. He'd be fine. V1 was here. Nothing would go wrong. It wouldn't let anything happen to him.

Getting to his knees, he took the sleeping V1 by the shoulder and shook it awake. Only partially shut down, it roused quickly at the jostling.

"It's today. And it's soon," Gabriel said.

V1 sat up in a flash, fans whirring an anxious buzzing noise.

It tapped the back of its wrist.

*How soon?*

"The kind of soon where I need to tell you everything you need to know very quickly or I'm not going to be able to finish before I stop being able to talk."

V1 motioned, frantically, for him to continue.

"Once it begins, I have little control of my body until it's complete," Gabriel explained. "I'll likely not be able to speak or explain what's happening."

V1 nodded, rapidly.

"Firstly, I'll begin to take in large breaths of air and force them down into my body to expand the new shell. Then I'll curl forward, arms around my knees. That's about when I'll stop breathing."

V1's anxious buzzing increased to a loud droning.

"I can go an extended time without oxygen. I'll be fine," Gabriel assured, but it did not stop V1's noises. "By then I should be able to split a seam down the back. That's when you can help me. Pull that seam open wider and use your hands to sort of break the seal between the old and new layers. Then I should be able to just slide out. If I can't make the seam by myself after about fifteen minutes, you can break it open yourself."

V1 just kept nodding.

"I'll be sensitive as hell and likely skittish. Don't let me run off, somewhere, alright? I'm soft and vulnerable like that."

V1's droning grew higher in pitch.

"I'm sure I won't try to run off," Gabriel promised. "There's nowhere I feel safer than here. Just don't be insulted if I panic a bit at first."

He took V1's hand in his.

"I'll see you on the other side, all shiny and new," he said.

V1 squeezed his hand and gave one final nod.

With a shudder, Gabriel felt reflex take hold of his lungs and he sucked in a breath, swallowing it down, followed by another, and another.

*Deep breaths. Don't panic. You're safe here,* Gabriel repeated to himself. *You're safe.*

He pulled his hand back and braced himself on the bed, trying to force his breaths to be as deep as possible.

Luckily, he could already feel the brittle plating of his back beginning to split. Little chance of being trapped, this time, even if V1 wasn't here to ensure that didn't happen.

Almost strange, in a way, to have no fear of it at all. In his youth, when he had molted more frequently, he was always alone. He'd had faith in himself and in the Father not to fail, but he never actually had any help. The strength of his faith overpowered any fear. Back then, he'd thought that felt the same as safety.

He'd never realized how great the difference could be between faith and trust.

He'd had faith in the Father to put no challenge before him he could not overcome. Faith that, should he fail, it was because he'd not been worthy of success. Faith that any outcome would be a part of the Lord's plan.

He had been endlessly, unshakably faithful to God.

He *trusted* V1.

Trusted it would not let him fail, regardless of how "worthy" he was. Trusted it to determine its own plan and follow through with it no matter what. Trusted it to see him at his softest and most vulnerable and turn its touch gentle to match. Trusted that he was safe, as long as it was near.

Faith overpowered fear. Trust dispelled it entirely.

Gabriel's back spasmed and his mind and body was gripped with the irresistible urge to curl in on himself.

His body moved practically on its own, curling into as tight of a ball as possible, arms wrapped around his knees and forehead pressed to the mattress. His shell tightened, constricting him.

*Just keep breathing. As long as possible. You're alright. You're safe.*

His trust didn't waver, nor did fear grip him, even as his breaths became shallower and shallower. Even as his senses dulled and his vision went dark.

The silent, perfectly still darkness stretched within and around him like an infinite void.

With all his senses gone, he felt like a speck in the endless nothing. No sound. No touch. No light.

No Light.

Nothing to judge the scale of forever. Nothing against which to compare the shape of existence. Purely subjective and without objective.

More suffocating than the lack of oxygen ever could hope to be.

Gabriel felt a tapping, like a light knocking on a door frame, somewhere in the darkness.

Of course. This was no time for nihilism.

Someone was waiting for him.

Pushing himself up and back, towards the tapping, Gabriel felt his old mantle split down the back.

Cool air touched his brand new skin and he shivered. The cramped flesh of his new shell swelled upwards, widening the gap and Gabriel prepared himself to push upwards again.

Before he could, however, he felt careful fingers brush against the newly exposed skin and practically convulsed, even the feather light touches like electric shocks to the brand new nerves.

Four hands gripped the edges of his split exoskeleton and pulled, roughly, outward, splitting it all the way from head to foot with a loud *"CRACK"*.

The same hands that rent holy metal in twain, reached beneath with a care that bordered on worshipful, creeping their way between the old and new shell, slowly and carefully working the gap between the two wider.

Gabriel couldn't even think to move or try to assist in his own extraction, his focus entirely devoted to not losing any and all sanity to the feeling of V1's fingers across his new skin.

Not even air had touched it, yet. It had not even a single moment to harden. Each nerve was raw like flesh flayed open, like organs exposed to open air. Every sense screamed that nothing, *nothing*, was ever supposed to touch this, that such places were never meant to feel this sensation.

The overstimulation and sense of wrongness mixed with the fire in his gut and the need burning across his skin and turned to the most horrible, wonderful agony.

He wanted it to stop. He needed it to continue. It was torture. It was *rapture.*

Gabriel could only try to ride out the raging sea of conflicting sensation without being drowned in the maelstrom.

Hands worked their way along his shoulders, up his neck, and around his sides to his chest and the seal holding his two layers of armor together was broken entirely.

Gabriel's wings pulled free and spread out behind him and he leaned back into the embrace of four, metal arms, letting himself be guided up and out of his old shell.

The lining of his spiracles was ripped from them as he threw his head back, pulling it free, as well.

He gasped, sucking in precious air for a few breaths before instinct gripped him again and he swallowed the air down.

V1 guided Gabriel down to the bed, pulling away his shed skin as it did so and finally tossing it away and to the ground, before repositioning itself to kneel beside him.

Gazing at him with its optic wide, it ran its hands over the glistening flesh of his new armor.

Gabriel squirmed, gasping down more air. He shook his head and batted away V1's touch.

Too much. Too much, too fast. He needed…he needed to catch his breath.

The softness of the blankets beneath him, the cool air of the bedroom, the gentle, warm exhaust from V1's fans, he could feel every sensation around him with such intense clarity, all while his mind still reeled and his lungs still worked to force air into his expanding new shell.

V1 complied with his silent request, pulling its hands away, hovering over him, with apparent concern.

At last, the compulsion to gulp down air released Gabriel and he panted for breath. He lifted a shaking hand to the side of V1's face, then let out a small gasp.

It was his left hand.

He pulled the hand back to inspect it, flexing the new fingers. With the light of V1's optic behind them, they were nearly transparent.

V1 held up its own, feedbacker hand, palm facing him.

Gabriel pressed tender fingers to each of V1's own, letting out a shaky breath as he felt each scratch across the metal plating there, as unique and intricate as fingerprints. He slid up his hand so it was palm to palm with V1's, dwarfing its smaller digits.

Suddenly, he gripped V1's hand in a vice grip, sucking in shuddering breath.

The faint, prickling heat that had been slowly rolling over his skin picked up in intensity, the molten pool in his gut that he'd felt for the last few days surging back to life with a sudden and intense fervor.

*"Fuck..."* he hissed, as warmth spread outward from his core, creeping up his neck and down to each one of his digits, focusing on his groin where a throbbing ache and a warm wetness grew more intense with each passing second.

He squirmed against the mattress, moving his thighs apart as even just the pressure of them pressed together was enough to send shocks through his whole body.

*"Fuck!"* He cried out as a wave of heat rolled over him.

Heat and *need.*

"M-Machine…V1…" he stammered, desperate hands grabbing for its arms.

V1 hovered its hands over Gabriel's chest, then paused, looking to him for confirmation.

"Yes. Yes, yes! *Please*," Gabriel said, voice bordering on frantic.

He needed those hands on him. He needed some kind of touch. Some kind of contact. He was burning alive without it!

The moan of relief and pleasure that escaped him as V1's hands finally met his skin might have been humiliating if Gabriel had cared about anything else in that moment but the feel of metal on flesh.

V1 lavished Gabriel's chest and stomach with touch, careful to keep the sharper claws of the knuckleblaster away from his skin until it was sure the sensation would not be too much.

Gabriel sighed and shuddered as fingers spread across his collar, stroked under his jawline, and gently squeezed at his bicep. Each touch lit up every fresh nerve of his skin. He'd never felt so sensitive before. Never knew just how intricate V1's digits were. How soft fabric was. How faintly the air could roll over skin.

It was instantly addicting. He needed so much more. Each of V1's touches just left a trail of fire and need in their wake, only stoking his desire.

He arched up into the Machine's touch with a whine.

Emboldened by Garbiel's positive reactions so far, V1 crawled over top of him, knees on either side of his waist.

Its touches got more exploratory and less gentle, pressing harder against Gabriel's teneral shell, fingers dragging more roughly as they traveled over his body.

Gabriel gasped and moaned, both reveling in the exquisite touches and suffering as the ache between his legs grew more and more demanding.

His hand moved towards his crotch, desperate to find some way to grant himself some relief, but his wrist was suddenly caught and pulled away.

Another hand grabbed his other wrist and pinned both on the mattress above his head.

V1 wagged a single knuckleblaster claw back and forth, making a clicking "tsk tsk" noise.

The message was clear: Gabriel's release was not something for him to seek, but something for V1 to grant.

He could only take what he was given and beg for the relief he was dying for, completely at the Machine's mercy.

…Oh that should *not* have turned Gabriel on so much.

"Merciless thing!" he gasped.

If the way it squeezed its hips around his was any indication, V1 enjoyed the moniker.

It ran the tip of its claw in lazy patterns across Gabriel's skin, just barely too light to pierce the flesh. The trails of fire it left in its wake were unmatched by the hottest pits of hell.

"Please. Please," he whimpered. "I need--"

The claw pressed down, white hot pain lancing through Gabriel like an iron poker just pulled from the fire, lighting up his new nerves like a live wire as it pierced, agonizingly slowly, into the flesh of his chest, just above his heart.

Gabriel's voice caught in his throat, a cry that could not decide itself between agony and ecstasy choked off by the sheer intensity of his own reaction.

It turned to a needy whimper, instead.

"Please. Machine," he breathed. "Tear me asunder. Lay me bare before you and take your fill of what you find. *Unmake me!"*

V1 didn't have to be told twice.

It slashed a wicked gash across Gabriel's chest, from shoulder to stomach, releasing his wrists to splay its fingers across the torn skin, lavishing in the torrent of blood that gushed from the wound.

Gabriel let out a ragged cry, his vision whiting out from the pain, while the heat of his core twisted, then crashed over him in a wave of pure euphoria.

He grabbed V1 and pulled it down to himself, pressing its chest to his, feeling the way its plating soaked up his blood. His hips rolled up against its as he rode out the waves of his pleasure while, already, the flames across his skin and in his core began to reignite.

The hunger in him would not be sated by so little, but it was curbed enough for him to shift his crushing grip to an embrace, pressing V1's head to the crook of his neck and holding its chest close to his as it fed.

Looking up at the ceiling, he gasped.

Gabriel looked up into the silvered glass of the mirror.

And Gabriel stared back down at him.

Skin pale and armor soft, slender, bloodied and vulnerable, holding his beloved close, wings of blue and gold stretched out behind him, was the reflection of an angel, and a monster.

Flesh and divine.

Meat and metal.

Saint and sinner.

Lover and killer.

Protector and destroyer.

Hated and shunned and discarded and found and loved and loved and *loved*.

He let out a sob, and a laugh.

"Oh," he breathed, voice thick with emotion, almost disbelief, as if greeting a long lost friend he'd never expected to see again. *"You."*

## Notes:

Title is a quote from the skeleton shrimp ZeFrank video that largely inspired this fic. Thanks "True Facts"!

A cool thing about me is that I can't write smut very well so basically any smut scene is going to be a little unsatisfying. Bear with me and enjoy the mental image of a funny bug man.

Finally the heavy handed mirror motif I built up the entire fic pays off.

## Chapter 16 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/53595460/chapters/135914812): Talk Biblical to Me, Baby

## Summary:

V1 is a merciless machine. Gabriel would like to pretend he's not into that.

## Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes (#chapter_16_endnotes).)

Blood blood blood

Gabriel's blood was exquisite. It was delectable. It was *divine.*

So many pleasurable chemicals rushing through his veins and into V1 as he pressed their bodies together, letting V1 have its fill.

It pressed itself harder against him, hearing him grunt with pain, then exhale shakily as that pain melted to pleasure.

It was so lucky. *Blessed*, one might even say, to find a lover like Gabriel, so perfect for it. Someone who would beg for it to tear him open and glut itself in his blood.

And it was so *good*.

How had it sustained itself on anything else? How had the blood of humans and demons and husks ever satisfied it, when something like Gabriel could exist?

It wanted more.

It wanted to dig into the gash with all its hands and tear the shiny new skin from bone, to dip its hands in his innards and rip out his heart, crushing it in its hands and draining every last drop of that radiant, heavenly blood, until nothing was left.

It bit back the raging hunger in it, taking only what it had been offered, only what it was freely given.

In a way, it enjoyed how it left it dissatisfied. Enjoyed the way its hunger cried out for more that it would not allow it.

It granted V1 the opportunity to chase other ways to feed its hungers.

V1 sat back up, enjoying the soft whimper that escaped Gabriel as it did so.

So needy, this Angel.

*Its* Angel.

It dragged its hands down Gabriel's chest and stomach as it crawled backwards, streaking blood across the pure white of the brand new armor.

It preferred the jet black and vibrant gold of the thinner portions of his armor, fully hardened, of course, but there was something to be said about painting the porcelain-like white with bold strokes of bright crimson.

A beautiful canvas, without a doubt.

V1 drew a little heart above Gabriel's pelvis.

Who said AI art wasn't real?

Satisfied with its foray into painting and refocused on fully exploring the *performance* arts, it settled itself between his thighs.

Gabriel's breathing was picking up again, V1's infrared heat sensors picking up another spike in his temperature.

He let out a whine and inched his legs further apart, hips rolling upwards, impatiently.

Poor thing. So desperate.

Too bad for him, no one programmed it for mercy.

V1 traced the tip of its claw along his inner thigh, making its way, leisurely, towards his groin.

Gabriel writhed and whined under its touch. Every time he bucked upwards for more contact, V1 pulled away in turn, waiting for him to be still again.

Patience is a virtue, Angel.

Gabriel seemed to catch on fairly quickly, letting out a frustrated groan. The way his heart rate spiked and his breath quickened betrayed his true feelings, however.

"Pitiless fiend!" he cried, voice cracking. "Spare me your heartless game!"

Ooh. So poetic. Talk biblical to me, baby.

Nonetheless, he stayed obediently still and that was worthy of a reward.

V1 palmed over his crotch, kneading the flesh there and granting Gabriel a bit of relief while also exploring just what it had to work with, this time around.

A horizontal seam that had been fully sealed last time was now partially open, the entrance hot and slick.

Sliding a finger up and under the lip of flesh revealed a deeper orifice that easily accepted the tip of the digit, before V1 slid it back out.

*"FUCK!"* Gabriel shouted, throwing his head back and gripping at the sheets.

His hips spasmed upwards, desperately trying to chase V1's touch, and he let out a moan that bordered on a sob.

Forgotten his lesson on patience, already. What a shame. Well, at least they could work on his "please"s and "thank you"s.

It rubbed little circles around the rim of his entrance, deeply enjoying the babbling mess the action turned him into.

"Machine--I can't--I need--*fuck*--I--I can't take it--!"

His voice was so gorgeous like this, but none of it was the magic words he needed if he wanted to *sing.*

V1 pressed harder, more languid circles, just shy of sinking into him again.

"V1, *please*! I need-- I need you-- need you *inside* me! Please, please I beg you, grant me rapture! I can't take it anymore!" Gabriel cried, practically shrieking. "Please, *fuck me! PLEASE!*"

Music to V1's lack of ears.

It sank the middle finger of its feedbacker hand into Gabriel up to the knuckle.

*"YES!"* Gabriel shouted, rutting up against V1's hand.

V1 pulled the digit back out slightly before sliding back in, repeating the motion in rhythm, using the heel of its palm to grind against the surrounding flesh with every thrust.

Gabriel pressed back against its touch, falling into sync with its movement. His back arched up from the mattress and his hands clenched at the sheets. The blue of his wings began to be overtaken by gold.

"Yes, yes, *yes!"*

V1 picked up its pace and Gabriel grabbed its shoulders, throwing his weight into every roll of his hips.

V1 wondered, if it pulled out now, whether it would completely break him. Hm, scratch that. With how pent up he was, that might actually kill him.

It, instead, used its thumb to slide under the small flap of skin covering Gabriel's entrance, rubbing against the underside of the lip, itself.

Gabriel came undone in moments, clenching around V1's finger, babbling nonsensical bits of praise, thanks and…was that latin?

There was a "Tower of Babble" joke to be made in there, somewhere, but V1 was more interested in focusing on drinking in the sound and sight of Gabriel beneath it, singing its praises, lavishing in the pleasure it gave him, letting it lay claim to him, completely.

Whatever instilled it with hunger for such a sight, whether meat or machinery, was thoroughly pleased.

That wasn't to say "satisfied", of course.

Gabriel's incoherent words turned to panting breaths as he rode out the last of his orgasm. His breath hitched in his throat, however, as he seemed to realize that V1's ministrations were not slowing down, but rather speeding back up again.

He sucked in a shuddering breath, squirming from overstimulation, but put forth no actual protest.

Whimpers and gasps of discomfort steadily melted into deep moans of pleasure which rose in pitch and volume as V1 slid another finger inside him.

The sounds escaping him were downright lurid. No more begging, just deep, throaty moans interspersed with needy gasps.

V1 slowed its pace, drawing out Gabriel's bliss as long as possible.

"Ah…Machine…it's so good," Gabriel groaned. "It feels so good. You…you feel *so good.*"

He rolled his hips in languid thrusts, in time with V1's curling fingers within him.

"So perfect…you're perfect…" he breathed, whispering more in what V1 was almost positive was latin.

Points for the romanticism of it all, at least.

Gabriel shuddered as he tipped into another, gentler orgasm, his breath coming out in a huff.

V1 pulled out of him and scooted up to lie on his chest, head on its arms, enjoying the pleasant heat radiating from his skin.

Gabriel panted for breath.

"This fire of mine flesh is yet unquenched, and its ember shall yet rekindle with as great a flame, I think. Yet, with thy deliverance, I find brief respite afore it should reclaim me."

Gabriel shook his head as if to clear it. What year was it?

"Uh. I think I'm not done yet," he corrected himself. "But, that helped a lot. I have a moment to catch my breath."

V1 let out a series of chirping sounds equivalent to teasing laughter.

Rolling the giggling Machine off of him, Gabriel sat up.

"Yes, yes, I know, I know. I was in *the Bible* and it rubbed off on my speech patterns a little, very funny," he grumbled, but seemed to be unable to keep a smile from his voice. "You try keeping several thousand years of human language in your head at once and see if you don't slip up once in a while."

V1 lay on its back and patted the bed next to it, inviting him to lie beside it.

"Hm?" Gabriel hummed. "Do you think me wicked, Machine?"

He shook his head, slowly.

"The wicked borrows but does not pay back, but the righteous is generous and gives," he said, a distinctly hungry, taunting tone to his voice.

He leaned close to V1's face, taking its "chin" between his thumb and forefinger.

The thin membrane that had covered his mandibles during his molt split and his jaws fell open.

"As I have dealt kindly with you, so *you* will deal *kindly* with *me*."

V1 had a sudden feeling it might come to regret how much it had teased Gabriel, earlier.

## Notes:

Buddy nutted so hard he got hit with the Lorem Ipsum beam. Smh.

I deeply enjoy the degree to which Gabriel jumps registers in game and I play with that a lot in this fic. This is probably the most prominent example, but that's one of my favorite things to do in writing so I do it a lot. Jumping from very purple prose to something very cut and dry or even vulgar. This is peak literature to me.

## Chapter 17 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/53595460/chapters/135915187) : Stupid, Sexy Machinery

## Summary:

V1 faces something akin to a consequence. It plans to learn nothing from this.

## Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes (#chapter_17_endnotes) .)

Gabriel grabbed its leg by the ankle and pulled it up over his shoulder, using his other hand to cradle its back and pin its other knee to his side with his elbow.

V1 hooked its free leg around him as best it could, for support.

How did it always seem to forget just how much *larger* he was than it?

Gabriel scraped his fingers along V1's metallic spine, clicking against each groove, sending reverberations straight through V1's body.

He then wrapped a finger around the tubing that flanked its spine which carried blood from its fuel tanks to its lower body.

"I never realized just how *warm* you were, Machine," he breathed, rolling the flexible plastic between his fingers. "How the blood pulses through you like this. Is there a heart in that chest of yours? Does that make these your veins?"

He tugged at the tubing, prompting a wave of warning signals from V1's processors.

"And yet, you leave them so exposed. Is it because you were built to fight things too large to access these areas?"

He slid his hand deeper into its machinery, slipping underneath its back plating to feel where its wings connected to its back beneath the outer covering.

His voice dropped to a husky whisper.

"Or just because your makers knew that, if anything ever had you in its clutches like this, close enough to have access to this…" He hiked up V1s leg on its shoulder, bringing his mouth to the exposed mechanisms of its inner thighs. *"You'd already be dead?"*

Gabriel's mouthparts reached into the space between V1's leg and pelvis, finger-like palps brushing against and caressing wires, cables, and tubing.

V1's mind screamed at it.

*Foreign objects detected! Proximity warning! Initiate defensive measures!*

*Crush it between gears! Sever squirming insect feelers with sharp steel! Spill its blood so it floods mechanical innards!* ***Crush it kill it consume it!***

Even if it had wanted to obey, Gabriel's grip held the gap open as his mouth continued its explorations.

Warnings popped up faster than V1 could dismiss them, taking up more and more memory, until the signals all blurred together into an intense, all encompassing focus on the area Gabriel lavished attention on, artificial adrenaline flooding its systems.

Gabriel hadn't been wrong. V1 had never been programmed with defensive routines for something small enough to get this deep in between its plating. Designed to combat something the size of a city, it had no specific programming to fend off something creeping its way inside of it like this.

With no specific code to follow, it defaulted to "crank up levels of awareness of the affected area and hope some solution presents itself with the new information". Considering that, in any battle scenario in which something already had teeth around its most vital wiring, it would have a few moments at most to react, its redirection of processing power to sensory input from the area under "attack" happened in nanoseconds, and had no predetermined end point.

In end effect, V1's brain was pouring every single ounce of its power into being hyper aware of *exactly* how Gabriel's mouth felt in between its thighs and had no intention of stopping.

V1 let out a garbled noise, not able to make sense of the bombardment of sensation it was receiving.

Machinery at a loss, the meat did what it did best when faced with an overwhelming amount of sensation:

It rolled over into euphoria.

Signals shifted, pouring the deluge of input directly into its self reward centers and V1 snapped its hips up as best it could in Gabriel's iron grip, wings flaring out behind it, twitching with every movement of his mouth inside it.

It became aware of a whining noise that took it several moments to realize was coming from its own fans.

It had never felt anything with this level of excruciating clarity before. It could feel each gentle caress of his palps, each feather-light scraping from the ridges of his maxilla and labium which--fuck-- it couldn't even find childishly funny because it just felt so fucking *good*.

V1 just leaned into the feeling, letting its mind be dragged deeper and deeper into this all encompassing pleasure. It built up within it, coiling like a spring, threatening to send it crashing into total system reboot.

A system shock like it had gotten when Gabriel had bitten into its wires before would jolt it out of the strange data death loop its programming had locked itself into, but just as its systems crested on total overload, Gabriel would back off again, steering away from more vital wiring.

There was some kind of lesson about "just desserts" here but V1 refused to learn any kind of morals from being eaten out.

Again and again, it teetered on the brink, just for Gabriel to deny it again.

It was infuriating.

It was fantastic.

It was awful.

It wanted to go on forever.

It…

Was rapidly running out of working memory.

Uh oh.

V1 graped at Gabriel with all four of its hands, clawing and gripping while its fans continued to whine loudly.

It needed…it needed *something*!

Something had to happen, had to give, or it was going to overload or short circuit or maybe die or blow up or fuck knew what! It didn't know and it didn't care, it just needed Gabriel to stop *fucking teasing it* and let something *happen*!

It let out a series of desperate whistles and buzzes.

"Ah? Sorry? I didn't quite get that." Gabriel said, with a saccharine tone of false innocence. "Did you need something? You'll have to *enunciate.*"

*Son of a bitch, fucking Angel!*

He was going to make it speak, *now?!* As if it wasn't hard enough to try to get its jerry rigged voice mechanisms to spit out a word in normal circumstances?!

*Sadistic fucker! Damn you and your stupid sexy voice and awful, wonderful mouth fingers!*

V1 tried to focus through its rapidly dwindling supply of RAM, managing to force out a rough approximation of a shout.

***"P L E A S E !"***

In an act of mercy worthy of his angelic status, Gabriel bit into one of the blood fuel lines of V1's inner thigh, sending a rush of blood into its mechanics and jolting V1 out of its memory leak. Dumping all associated processes, it freed up all of its working memory in a split second.

Like a single point of infinite density exploding outwards, V1's awareness, funneled down to a singular, all encompassing process, snapped back to full, the mental whiplash(no relation) sending it careening into an overflow of positive signals.

Before shorting out completely.

It came to, again, a few seconds later, vaguely aware of Gabriel lowering it back down to the bed, his mouthparts lapping up the blood that had not yet been reabsorbed by V1's body.

He leaned back, rubbing his palps together to savor every bit of the taste.

"My blood, distilled through your veins," he breathed. *"Exquisite."*

V1 just gave a weak thumbs up.

Gabriel laughed, loud and clear, the sound echoing out through the city that once again was home to lovers.

In the end, they made the very most of the few hours before his armor hardened fully again.

## Notes:

Well, there it is. 20k words based off the stupid idea of "I think Gabriel should molt like a cicada". I'm fairly proud of this, despite the humorous premise and the fact I can't write smut to save my life. I'm glad to have been able to do some writing, since it's often so difficult for me. And very happy to actually have finished it instead of just having yet another abandoned multi-chapter fic on my account.

Hopefully you enjoyed it, as well.

## Chapter 18 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/53595460/chapters/135915307) : Epilogue

## Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes (#chapter_18_endnotes) .)

Hours later, lying in each others arms, V1 caught a glimpse of Gabriel's shed armor on the floor. As distressing as it had been to see it torn apart like last time, it was almost more upsetting to see a strange sort of hollowed out Gabriel suit.

It nodded towards the shell and tilted its head at Gabriel to indicate a question.

Gabriel turned to look behind him, then back to V1.

"Oh, my old skin? I suppose we'll have to get rid of it," he said.

V1 tilted its head the other way. Elaborate, Angel.

"I guess we could just leave it somewhere but I'm not sure I like the idea of Hell getting its hands on it," Gabriel said, then shrugged. "I'll probably just eat it."

Right. If Hell could turn the corpse of Minos into that giant monster thing, leaving essentially a hollowed out angel shell wo--

*WAIT HE'D PROBABLY **WHAT?!***

The shock must have been apparent in its expression, because Garbriel burst out in a fit of laughter.

## Notes:

Machine, what did you think "making up the mass afterwards" meant?

## Series this work belongs to:

- ← Previous Work (http://archiveofourown.org/works/53264053) Part 3 of Angels is Bugs (http://archiveofourown.org/series/3953374) Next Work → (http://archiveofourown.org/works/59220841)

Close (#)